



**GOVT, COLLEGE FOR WOMEN  
LIBRARY  
SRINAGAR**

Class No. F

Book No. G 61 G

Acc. No. 2046



THE  
GLORY OF ELSIE SILVER



## BOOKS BY LOUIS GOLDING

### *Fiction*

FORWARD FROM BABYLON  
SEACOAST OF BOHEMIA  
DAY OF ATONEMENT  
STORE OF LADIES  
THE MIRACLE BOY  
THE PRINCE OR SOMEBODY  
GIVE UP YOUR LOVERS  
MAGNOLIA STREET  
FIVE SILVER DAUGHTERS  
THE CAMBERWELL BEAUTY  
THE PURSUER  
THE DANCE GOES ON  
MR. EMMANUEL  
WHO'S THERE WITHIN?  
NO NEWS FROM HELEN  
THE GLORY OF ELSIE SILVER  
TWO JOLLY GENTLEMEN (in preparation)

### *Short Stories*

THE DOOMINGTON WANDERER  
PALE BLUE NIGHTGOWN

### *Verse*

SORROW OF WAR  
SHEPHERD SINGING RAGTIME  
PROPHET AND FOOL  
THE SONG OF SONGS, RENDERED AS A MASQUE

### *Travel*

SUNWARD: ADVENTURES IN ITALY  
SICILIAN NOON  
THOSE ANCIENT LANDS: A JOURNEY TO PALESTINE  
IN THE STEPS OF MOSES THE LAW-GIVER  
IN THE STEPS OF MOSES THE CONQUEROR

### *Belles-Lettres*

ADVENTURES IN LIVING DANGEROUSLY  
LETTER TO ADOLF HITLER  
THE JEWISH PROBLEM  
JAMES JOYCE  
THE WORLD I KNEW  
HITLER THROUGH THE AGES

### *Anthology*

WE SHALL EAT AND DRINK AGAIN (WITH ANDRÉ L. SIMON)

Ap. 32

THE  
GLORY OF ELSIE SILVER

(C.A.)

by  
LOUIS GOLDING

HUTCHINSON & CO. (Publishers), LTD.  
LONDON :: NEW YORK :: MELBOURNE :: SYDNEY

no Book  
Bouling  
Rs-7-12-0  
191-4-3-46

FOR  
SIMON AND MIRIAM MARKS  
BECAUSE THEY, TOO,  
HAVE FOUGHT THE BATTLE

Set

S  $\frac{347}{34}$

84139

823  
95626

2046

PRINTED IN  
GREAT BRITAIN,  
AT THE ANCHOR  
PRESS, TIPTREE,  
:: ESSEX ::

## CHAPTER ONE

### I

*Ya-hoó-oo ! Ya-hoó-oo !* the sirens went, an ill-bred, belly-raking noise.

"Damn !" went the woman in the corner of the carriage. "*Damn !*" In English !

That was all wrong. It was more wrong, somehow, than the sirens going *Ya-hoó-oo*, which is quite an international noise. But "*Damn !*", in English, in a train thumping through the western suburbs of Munich, with the sirens going and the first bombs already falling—at such a moment an English "*Damn !*" is disturbing. It produced exactly the same effect as if the lady had switched on a torch, with the light shining upward. In fact one passenger, the commercial gentleman who had been chewing doggedly at a bright red cable of garlic sausage, cried out sharply: "*Licht ausmachen ! Put that light out !*" Then, of course, he felt rather silly. He cleared his throat, and stared straight in front of him, as if he had not opened his mouth. Everybody's shoulders sagged a trifle, then straightened up again.

*Crump !* That was a close one, *Gott im Himmel*, and a big one ! It could hardly have been more than a few kilometres away westward, and it sounded dead on the line, too. It's odd how vulnerable you feel in a train, with all that glass about, and all of a sudden the roof seems about as solid as tissue-paper.

*Die verfluchten Engländer !*

*Crump !* That was closer, only a couple of kilometres away. Apparently they weren't following their usual route, up from Switzerland. They were coming in from the west, along the line of the railway-tracks. It was moonlight, but there was a good deal of cloud cover.

The sausage-chewing commercial gentleman was in a fine state of nerves. He was on the floor now, trying to get under the seat. That wasn't easy, because he was very large, and the carriage was very crowded. There were three high army officers, one of them a general or something, with the oak leaves on his lapel just showing inside the heavy fur collar of his greatcoat, acquired in Russia probably. The Order Pour Le Mérite hung down an inch or two from the centre of the collar. The other officers had lots of ribbons, too. Their bald pates glinted in the moony darkness. They just sat there, hands on their knees, tough, impassive, like the gods at Karnak. They were more cramped, of course.



There was a civilian gentleman, whose white stiff cuffs gleamed like lilies in a funeral chapel. They were held together by complicated gold cuff-links that were clicking like castanets. He had got into the train at Ulm. Somehow room had been found for him. He looked important with that slick hair and that brief-case. He was not a bit slick now, with the air-raid on.

There was an old woman beside him who was less affected by the bombs. She bowed her head a little, that was all. She was in mourning. It was easy to believe she had lost most of what she cared for on this earth in the fighting on the scattered fronts, or in the raiding of the cities.

The woman who had said "Damn!" did not seem much affected by the bombing, either. It was, in fact, not because the Alert went that she said "Damn!" On the other side of Ulm, while it was still daylight, she had removed from the large Viennese handbag on her knee a handsome casket of chocolates, embossed *Schrafft, New York*. It must have come in by diplomatic bag by way of Lisbon, or somewhere. With great deliberation the lady took out one chocolate, then another. They were large and succulent chocolates, they made your mouth water. Then she put the box away, as if that was all she was going to allow herself for the time being, she had her figure to think of. Some time later she started looking at her watch. After an interval of presumably an hour, she took out the casket again, and devoured two more chocolates, then two more an hour later. As the long hours rolled by and the evening deepened, the intervals became shorter and the ration larger. At the moment the Alert went, some five or six miles outside Munich, she had a particularly opulent chocolate at her teeth. The Alert went, the lady bit a little too sharply, the sweet mush spurted out over her chin. She said "Damn!", she took out a little lace handkerchief, put her face to rights, then she went on stuffing herself with chocolates, as if nobody would notice now that she was considerably exceeding her ration per hour. She looked as comfortable as if it were a summer evening before the war, and the carriage was a canoe on the Wannsee, heaped with cushions.

She was an interesting-looking lady, delectable and expensive, like those chocolates and their gold casket. Was she American by origin? It was difficult not to be interested in her, with her face more than half hidden by the little veil that hung down so archly from the hat-brim. Paris, of course. So were the shoes, and the skirt, and the little fur jacket. They would always make clothes like that in Paris whatever the banner was that floated over the attics of the Rue St. Honoré. Was she Parisian? Or was she merely on her way back from Paris after fitting herself out there?

The journey was at last drawing to an end. They would be at the Munich Hauptbahnhof in a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes. Then the sirens went. Then the lady said "Damn!"

The commercial gentleman started as if a horse-fly had bit him. "Turn



that light out!" he shouted. Then he bit his tongue. "I thought so all along!" he said inside himself. "She's an English spy!"

"I thought so all along," concluded the gentleman with the slick hair and the chattering cuff-links. "That's Elsie Silver!"

"*Aber ja!*" mused the bald general with the fur collar and the Iron Cross First Class. "*Das ist sie!* That's her: Frau General von Brockenburg!"

The commercial gentleman was wrong. The lady was not an English spy. We have no further interest in the commercial gentleman. The gentleman with the slick hair and the bald general with the medals were both right. The lady's name had once been Elsie Silver. She was now Frau General von Brockenburg, wife of Seiner Excellenz Obergruppenführer der S.S. General Wilhelm von Brockenburg.

Our interest in the gentleman with the slick hair is perfunctory. In the late nineteen-twenties and the early thirties the gentleman had been something of a somebody in the Kurfürstendamm theatre. He had been an artists' agent, he had provided chatty little bits for the theatrical columns of the newspapers. In those capacities he had made the acquaintance of the celebrated Elsie Silver, at that time the darling of cabaret and intimate revue in Berlin. She had been a gold-mine for the good fellow. She was the daughter of a Doomington tailor, and Jewish by origin, as he was the first to nose out, though she made no violent effort to conceal the fact, and in those days it was a matter of less import than it came to be. When she appeared in Berlin, she was actually a lady of title, being still married to an English baronet, who had dissolved out of her life in a shower of tears in a dentist's waiting-room in Nice. In Berlin she had found her life's *grande passion*, a certain Oskar von Straupitz-Kalmin, a ruined nobleman, an habitué of the circles of the Crown Prince. She kept this Oskar in the lap of luxury till the Nazi dawn came up like thunder, and another lover took possession of the territory, the magnificent and formidable Wilhelm von Brockenburg.

By the time Brockenburg appeared, the slick-haired investigator who came from Czechoslovakia had moved back from the Kurfürstendamm to the Sudetenland, where he exercised his faculties in regions at once more sombre and even more tortuous than theatrical journalism. He became a Gestapo official, and it may have been for that reason that when he boarded the very crowded compartment at Ulm that day in April, nineteen-forty-three, when we briefly make his acquaintance, the train official expeditiously found a place for him by turning out into the corridor a feeble old man who could hardly stand up. Something of the sort had happened earlier when a place had been reserved at the frontier-station of Kehl, despite the loud demands which were made for it, and at Baden-Baden a scented and veiled lady had proceeded to occupy it.



One way and another the journey had been one of alarms and excursions. But (to return briefly to the affairs of the sleek-haired gentleman) over in the Sudetenland, back in the early days of the Nazi regime, the gentlemen had been posted to study the affairs of people less exalted and piquant than Brockenburg and his mistress. However, there was no Gestapo rat-hole where the famous Emmanuel affair was not discussed, the affair of the bumbling old English Jew who had come over to Berlin on some wild-goose business connected with a refugee boy and his missing mother. The old fuss-pot had been locked up, with the idea of making a sort of Van der Lubbe out of him; and then, as the Gestapo boys told one another, tittering and whispering and stroking their whiskers—the Jew-girl had nagged Brockenburg into getting the old buffer released; for it happened that she was an old pal of this Emmanuel, she had been brought up on his doorstep in some ghetto dump in Doomington. There had never been much love lost between Brockenburg and Himmler, and it was whispered everywhere that the Emmanuel business didn't make them love each other any more.

"That's her!" said the slick-haired gentleman with the brief-case that doubtless carried a load of no good at all for an assortment of folk here and there. "That mouth! Those hips! That's Elsie Silver right enough! She must be getting on, you know!" He made a calculation on his fingers. "Good God! She'll never see forty-five again! She doesn't look a day over thirty! *What a woman! How does she manage it? Look at her—gorging herself with chocolates! Where does she get them from? Anyhow I'll make a note of it: Afternoon train from Kehl to Munich, April tenth, 1943, convinced that fellow-passenger was one-time cabaret star, Elsie Silver . . .*"

Then the siren went, and the lady swore.

"That's her!" the gentleman said. But from that moment his pre-occupation with the lady dwindled. He had other things to think about.

"*Aber ja!*" mused the bald general with the fur collar and the Iron Cross First Class. "That's her! Frau General von Brockenburg!"

The Herr General had, in fact, met her at Potsdam, in the Spring before the war. At least he had been introduced to her, and by Brockenburg. The occasion was a reception given by the Totenkopf-Husaren in honour of the birthday of their old commander, Feldmarschall von Mackensen; the place was the stuffy old Hotel zum Einsiedler, in the Schlosstrasse. The old boy could still walk in, he didn't have to be wheeled in. It was all very grand and proper, more like the days of Frederick the Great than Reichskanzler Hitler, and it needed a fair amount of nerve even for a Brockenburg to let loose the Jew-girl, the ex-cabaret girl, among those platoons of lofty lorgnetted bosoms. It was true the *Rassen-Amt*, the Race Department, had



formally pronounced the lady to be an Aryan, an Aryan by blood, that is to say, not merely an "honorary" Aryan. She had been married to the Herr General with the utmost propriety, and the Führer himself had signified his pleasure by sending the happy pair a hand-painted portrait of himself in one of his happiest moods. It was, in fact, generally felt that the Frau General was set fair to take her place among the handful of *Hofjudinnen*, Court Jewesses, whom from time to time the Führer warmed with the sunshine of his favour. There had been Frau Lehar, the wife of his favourite composer, with whom he had graciously permitted himself to be photographed during a performance of *The Merry Widow*; there had been the Prinzessin Hohenlohe, who had become one of his ambassadors-at-large; there had been the charming little dancer, Lilli Steinach. Why not Elsie Silver, one-time Lady Malswetting, and now the Frau General von Brockenburg? There was no doubt that, at the time of the marriage, Brockenburg was as high as he had ever been in the Führer's regard, even at the time of the Emmanuel affair, which would have turned out very differently, and not for Mr. Emmanuel alone, if a peremptory minute had not been issued from Berchtesgaden.

But alas, despite all that, the Frau General did not become *persona grata* with Herr Hitler like those other ladies, who had even been invited to take coffee and éclairs with him now and again. Perhaps it was because in that perpetual secret tug-of-war behind the veil, Himmler's weight was pulling an extra ounce or two. Perhaps it was something to do with the lady herself, a glint in the eye, a something lurking in the corner of the mouth. At all events there were no éclairs for the Frau General.

What, then, was the hidden motive behind the appearance of the Herr and Frau General at the Mackensen reception in Potsdam?—for nothing happens in circles so exalted which has not its hidden motive, however deep and dark. They had been invited, of course. You do not *not* invite a Brockenburg. But, to tell the truth, he was not really welcome. It was not a mere Nazi rally. If you had a good deal of nerve, and even more money, you could turn up at a Nazi rally with a Jewish negress (if the combination is not too horrific to consider). But at the Hotel zum Einsiedler, at a reception given by the Totenkopf-Husaren in honour of their old Commander, it is different. It is a gathering so starchy that, if anybody smiles, the starch comes off in flakes. The minutest social interchange is governed by a most elaborate protocol.

They did not really like Brockenburg in the innermost arcana of the army priesthood—and that was not because he had married a Jewess. The same could be said of more than one of them; whilst General Milch, who, under General Goering, was in command of the Luftwaffe, was three-quarters a Jew. They did not like Brockenburg in Potsdam any more than they liked him in the Alexanderplatz, in the bowels of the Gestapo. He had for years turned his back on the political and police activities of the S.S., and had



played a leading-part in the building up of its combatant units, the Waffen-S.S. His attitude towards the Inner Politics of the Gestapo was indicated by his intervention in the Emmanuel affair, which had not been forgotten. Similarly at Potsdam his position was equivocal. Whilst his mother was the offspring of an impoverished Junker family, his father had been the manager of a waterworks—something, even, of an intellectual. It had been due to his mother's family connections that he had been taken on by a smart cavalry regiment. Since his ascent into the highest political sphere, it was felt that his influence had been steadily exerted on the side of the newly-created political army as against the hereditary army which had accepted him. They did not like him in Potsdam. The strength of his position was not institutional, so to speak; it was personal. While the Führer and Feldmarschall von Goering loved him, all was well. It was not known at the time of the Mackensen reception whether they still loved him with such ardour.

Perhaps the appearance of the Herr and Frau General at the reception had a political significance. Perhaps it was an attempt to enlist Potsdam in his support in case the issues of the secret battle sharpened. The fact was, it had not been a success. It was difficult, it was impossible, to say why. The Frau General behaved with exemplary decorum, as if she was descended from a line of soldiers that went back to the Teutonic Knights. As the saying is, butter would not have melted in her mouth. Was that, perhaps, what was wrong? The voice was just a shade too liquid, the eyes just a shade too tender. Or was there not the faintest glint of mockery in them? The fact is, everybody was just a little embarrassed. And one or two people came back from that reception and were really quite virulent.

These included, as it happens, the wife of the gallant soldier with whom we are spending a little time while the train from the frontier at Kehl is trying, despite heavy discouragement, to conclude the last stage of its journey to Munich.

"You should be ashamed of yourself!" said the lady to her husband from the billowy recesses of their bed, on the night of the reception at the Hotel zum Einsiedler. She was a sharp-boned flat-chested lady. "Anyone would have thought you were an eighteen-year-old cadet the way you stood there gaping and gawking at her! The little Jewish slut! Pah!"

The General had certainly found her easy to look at, that day in the hotel at Potsdam. He had for some time preferred them that way, with substance, though not too much of it. That was four years ago now, and he had not set eyes on her again. And there, in the Munich train, there she was—he was almost quite certain there she was. She had got on to the train at Baden-Baden, and had occupied a corner seat which had been reserved at Kehl, though the train was crowded to suffocation. It had been imagined by everyone in the compartment that it was some general, at least, and it was



she, this woman, with a veil half down her face, and a smart pig-skin weekend case, and a leather handbag. He had said to himself at once: "I know that woman. I've seen her somewhere. Who is she?" The question tormented him for some time, until, in fact, she took out the box of chocolates and lifted the veil an inch or two to pop a chocolate into her mouth. Then suddenly it came to him. "That's who she is! Frau General von Brockenburg! I'll eat my riding-boots if it isn't! That's why a place was reserved for her. What's she doing, travelling alone, without a maid or anything? Perhaps it isn't her, after all? I'll be damned if it isn't!"

There are times when, if you're travelling in the same compartment as a lady you think you know, you just ask her: Are you? Whether she is or isn't, it might help to pass the time away. But not in Germany, when you're a high army officer. And not if the lady has an odd sort of background, like the Frau General (if that *is* the Frau General). You never know who's keeping an eye and an ear open. That fellow with the smooth black hair, for instance. What's he all about? Is it just bills and invoices he's got there, stuffed in the fat brief-case?

And it's not so much that the Frau General was a Jew by birth. (And what's that they were saying in the mess the other day—that the sister of the Frau General is the wife of a Bolshevik Kommissar? Did somebody say that—or am I dreaming?) It's not the Frau General who needs to worry about herself. She'll come to a sticky end, anyway. It's in her face. I wish she'd lift that veil again. That's better. Of course it's her! I wonder where that box of chocolates came from. New York, isn't it? A tender token from an old-time lover?

It's not the Frau General who needs to worry, it's the Herr General himself. That's what they've been saying for months now. The Führer is displeased. It's the turn of the other end of the see-saw, the Himmler end. Up, up, up!

Ah well, you never know! Perhaps Brockenburg will still be sitting astride the plank by the time Himmler starts coming down again.

The miles went by, the hours went by. The Alert sounded. The lady swore . . . in English.

"What did *I* say?" mused the Herr General.

## II

The lady was restless. She didn't fidget or anything, partly because there wasn't enough room in the carriage, and partly because she never had been that sort. She had had a great deal of self-control to begin with, and



she had acquired quite a lot more during the years of her life in Germany, though she did break down now and again. The restlessness was all inside her.

It had really been very uncomfortable during these last few months in Berlin. There was nothing to *do*. Now and again she smashed crockery, with a hammer or a bronze or something. She would do it with such deliberation and such a complete lack of expression, you would either imagine she was mad, or that you were mad, and seeing things. Smashing crockery had been for years one of her ways of letting off steam. The stock of crockery on the dressers at her various residences was getting low, and it was difficult to replenish it these days. Sometimes, when she didn't smash crockery, she screamed—but behind closed doors, and through clenched teeth. She didn't want it to get around she was a certifiable lunatic.

Of course her position wasn't easy, though her husband had done all he could for her, and that was a lot, because he was Brockenburg. She was Jewish when he fell in love with her, even though by marriage she was an English lady of title. Now she was Aryan. She had papers to say so. Brockenburg had come to her apartment one day with a face as black as thunder. There had been a conference of the Big Boys, as Elsie irreverently called them. Something had been said by Goebbels and Himmler, who had ganged up on him. He refused to say what, but he insisted that he wasn't going to leave them with that ace in their hands. As for Elsie, she couldn't mark time any longer. She must either leave Germany or stay in it. If she stayed, she must become Aryan.

First she roared with laughter. Then there was a row. Then she slapped his face. Then he nearly choked her. Then she forgave him and cried, and, her eyes dewy with tears: "Yes, darling," she said. "I'll become an Aryan."

Next day a gentleman appeared at the apartment from a *Rassenforschungs Büro*, one of those licensed semi-official agencies which set themselves to the job of proving that selected Jews were, in fact, Aryan, or were so little Jewish that it didn't really matter, despite their appearance and the erroneous ideas held about them both by themselves and everyone connected with them till that time. The *Büro* undertook prodigies of dispassionate research, then presented the results of its labours to the *Rassen-Amt*, the Race Department, which uttered the final pronouncement on the issue.

It was rather a scruffy gentleman, with a blue-black chin and the suspicion of a hump-back, who presented himself at Elsie's apartment. "Welcome," murmured Elsie Silver, "to my little Nordic hero." He had large spectacles, a large note-book, a pocket bristling with fountain-pens, and a pair of herring-bone trousers that trailed behind the heels. In the most business-like tone he informed his client that the method by which it was most frequently



established that Herr Kahn, say, or Frau Kahn, was not really so objectionably Jewish as he or she might have been, was the discovery that, though Herr or Frau Kahn's mother had been legally wedded to her Jewish consort, she had, in fact, committed adultery with a gentleman of the most irreproachable Aryan antecedents. Did the circumstances that had attended the conception of the Frau General tend to corroborate such a construction of the situation? Had the Frau General's mother, whom he understood to have been an Englishwoman, lived in the neighbourhood of a garrison town, or was she perhaps on a visit there?

The Frau General repressed a violent desire to lift the race-expert by the back of his collar and throw him through the window. Her mother and father were still alive, she informed him demurely, in the city of Doomington, in England, and they were of Russian origin. They had been the parents of four other daughters, and it was to be presumed they would repudiate with heat the suggestion that their mother was an adulteress. Moreover, Doomington was not a garrison town.

The expert looked hurt and worried. The difficulties that were being put up by the Frau General were anything but trivial. He was instructed to say that, in the last resort, it ought to be possible to have the Frau General declared an Honorary Aryan, in view of the testimonial the Herr General would put up regarding her highly valuable and confidential services to the Fatherland.

The lady raised her eyebrows. And what might those services be, she wanted to know. The expert floundered a little. He was not in possession of the full facts.

"Chuck it!" she said, in the most idiomatic German. "Try again!"

The job was not at all easy, and the General spent a lot of money during the next few months, and the *Büro* amassed a lot of documents.

"I'm getting out of it!" said Elsie Silver. "I've had enough of it!" She had used those words quite a number of times since the advent of Herr Hitler, five years ago. But she didn't get out of it. She stayed on.

She stayed on for a number of reasons. She loved Berlin and Germany and Germans. She had loved them under the Weimar regime and she loved them under the Nazis. She loved the danger and the terror, and the closer they crept up to her, the more she loved these things. She loved her lover, Count Oskar von Straupitz-Kalmin, whom she had loved before she had set eyes on him, and would love after it was all over. She did not live with him now, although she sent him wads of notes from time to time. It was strenuous being so much in love, and she was a lazy woman. So she loved Oskar, and she loved Brockenburg, too, or at least she was very fond of him, the caveman he usually was, the whimpering baby he was sometimes. Without



Brockenburg there would be no Berlin, no Oskar, no anything. . . . So she stayed on.

Where could she go if she didn't, who wanted her? She had no use for England, and England had no use for her. Where else? The Argentine? Sweden? Rhodesia? Start life all over again, from scratch? Open a cabaret for other young women to sing and dance in (for, well-preserved as she was, she was not of the heroic stuff that makes up a Guilbert, a Mistinguett, a Massary)? No, she had not their magnanimity, and, to tell the truth, she had not their talent, either. Also, she would find those other young women odious. She would want to scratch their eyes out. No cabaret, then. A casino? A dress-shop? No. What then, in Heaven's name? Nothing! She was bone-lazy, except in insane spurts. She didn't want to do anything at all.

Besides, there were Jews in those places, in all places, and the Jews did not love her, the mistress of Brockenburg; no, they did not love her.

It had got out, somehow, both inside and outside Germany, that there had been one occasion in these recent years when she had been a good little girl. A good little Jew-girl, that is to say. That was, of course, the time when she had got that old fool, Mr. Emmanuel, out of the mess where he had landed himself. With the assistance of Brockenburg, of course. One ought not to underrate how useful Willy had been in the transaction—Himmeler certainly didn't.

What on earth had she stuck out her chin like that for (to use the horrible phrase of the writers on boxing)? It might have turned out very awkwardly indeed for everyone concerned, including the old buffer himself. Oh no. Old Mr. Emmanuel had been in a jam. Things couldn't have gone any worse for him, not in any way. But for herself, and the illustrious Willy, and the inglorious Oskar . . . they might all have been dragged down very low indeed. What on earth had she done it for?

She had given herself a fine line of talk. How did it go? She still had it off pat. Somehow she still felt herself a Jew. It sounded quite mad, but there it was. A Jew? But *how*? Obviously not in religion; she had no more use for side-curls than for a shaven five-shilling piece in the middle of the scalp. A Jew by race, then? God Almighty, she'd heard enough poppycock about race to drown the noise of Niagara. Being a Jew by race cut no ice with her, either.

With what, then? Something inside herself (she worked it out hopelessly). You were true to that, whatever it damn well was, and you were still something. You still had some decency, integrity, honour. My! she grimaced. What a mouthful! You were untrue to that . . . she had made up a grand phrase about herself, she was really quite proud of it . . . you were untrue to that, and you left yourself a harlot, a heap of self-indulgent muck.



And finally . . . it would be more useful to be inside the fortress than outside. (That was how she had wound it all up.) What had she meant by that? She had obviously meant *something*, God knows, she had repeated the phrase to herself often enough. What had she meant? She could only have meant one thing. She would be a Little Mother of the miserable, of the hunted. For there would be other Mr. Emmanuels, and she would give them a hand—not merely English Mr. Emmanuels, German ones, too; Czechs, Poles, let them all come.

She had never been an actress, she had never been more than a "turn", whether in vaudeville or cabaret. But, like most "turns", she had often felt deep inside herself she was a hell of a good actor if only somebody gave her the chance. And she had fancied herself no end in that Little Mother act. She could see herself with a shawl round her head gliding along from doorway to doorway in the shadows, till somewhere, from some hole in the wall, a furtive hand reached out a note to her containing her instructions, and her own hand closed on it, and a moment later she was gone.

But it hadn't turned out like that.

She wasn't of the stuff that Florence Nightingales and Grace Darlings are made. She was too lazy, too selfish. She loved her bed too much, whether or not there was a man in it.

Oh yes, They had contacted her. She hadn't the faintest idea in the world who They were, but They had contacted her. Perhaps they were just a Jewish gang, more probably they were some general anti-Nazi organization. They wanted her help, and she was in a position to give them plenty. She had money, and she had Brockenburg. She was on the inside right enough. So one day she found a note in her handbag, a neatly folded bit of exercise-book paper, all nice and non-committal, with a message pencilled in capital letters. *Stand up at the window today at five o'clock [the note said], and blow your nose.* It was as simple as that, as fabulously impertinent as that.

How had the note got there? She had as much idea as the man in the moon. Had her maid, Brauner, put it there? Or Fanni and Toni, the married couple in the kitchen? She rang for Brauner and asked her to do something or other, move a vase of flowers, remove a spot of dust from the telephone. Then quietly and distinctly she read out the message on the piece of paper, holding the thing in front of her. Brauner turned. "*Bitte?*" she asked. "Please?" She hadn't got the hang of the words, or pretended she hadn't.

Elsie turned and looked into her eyes long and intently. No, nothing there, no guilt, no discomfort, nothing. If Brauner was acting, she was a great actress, and she herself was an idiot. Brauner had not put the note in the handbag. Neither had Fanni, nor Toni.

Elsie shrugged her shoulders. They were clever, those people. She did



not stand up at the window that day at five o'clock and blow her nose. The insolence of those people! She was cold with anger.

Besides, Brockenburg was there. What on earth would Willy think if, after keeping an anxious eye on the clock, she got up at five precisely, went over to the window, and blew her nose? Was he an imbecile? And was she?

And yet, as the months went by, she couldn't help asking herself whether Willy would have batted an eyelid if she had done what they asked her. After all, people stroll over to their own windows now and again. They do blow their own noses.

And supposing she had, what would have happened by now, what would she have been involved in? Her heart grew sick, because it all sounded so infernally strenuous, such a *damm* bore. If she was in bed, she stretched out her legs luxuriously between the silk sheets, and sighed with relief. If she was eating asparagus, she helped herself to another handful, and rolled the sticks over and over in the melted butter sauce.

"Well, well," she murmured, "let's hope it keeps fine for us."

Then, some six or seven months later, she found another note in her handbag, just like before, a pencilled note in capitals, on a bit of paper torn from an exercise-book.

*We understand [the note said]. He was there. He will be busy tomorrow. You will be rung up at five o'clock.*

Next day came. It was a long time coming. What was she to do about them, the Callers at five o'clock? She could tell Brockenburg, who would have it seen to. While the conversation was proceeding, the other telephone could be taped, marked down, surrounded. They had doubtless thought of that, the Others, but they had felt the risk worth taking.

But there was no risk. They knew it. You don't, for instance, rub your face in vomit.

What then? She could be out at five o'clock, of course, when they rang up. But that didn't get you anywhere. There would be another little note in the handbag, or under the loaf, maybe. If They wanted you to hear from them, you heard from them. And it wasn't very comfortable to have bits of paper like that floating round the place.

So she stayed in. She went to bed, as usual, for the nap after lunch; right into bed, pyjamas and everything, no nonsense about it. But she couldn't even close her eyes. She tossed and kicked, as if the bed was full of bread-crumbs. So she got up and dressed, and went over to her sitting-room, and strode up and down, up and down, for an hour, till her head started swimming. Then she went for a walk. Then she came back again. Then she sent Brauner out, and Fanni and Toni, too, though that had to be done rather cleverly, for she always kept one of the couple in, except on their



special married evening out, once a month. She sent them all out, for she wasn't going to take any risks. If they happened to be an inch or two away from the other telephone when it started ringing, they might be too quick for her; they might lift the receiver and hear something—God knows what.

The telephone was on a small table by the sofa. There was half an hour to go before the telephone rang. She sat down, she got up, she returned to the sofa and put her legs out. That happened four or five times. Then the clock struck. Then the telephone rang. She was lying curled upon the sofa at the moment it started ringing. It was like a needle the way the legs thrust forward along the sofa. The telephone went on ringing. She lay there rigid, her legs forward, her arms taut along her flanks. The telephone went on ringing. It was like her father calling out to her, and her mother, and her four sisters, all the people she had known in her girlhood in Oleander Street and Magnolia Street, the vaudeville folk from the grubby little Doomington theatres where she had started her career, the boys she had flirted with and skirmished with, in Doomington, in Blackpool, in the Number Two towns, in the Number One towns when she had graduated to that height, in London finally, when at last her name blazed out in lights. They called out to her, Jew folk from all the world, Christian folk from England, her own land. One way or another they had something to say to her. The telephone went on ringing. She did not answer it.

About a year later an event occurred that caused considerable excitement in German-Jewish circles, and in circles wider than those. A Jewish youth of nineteen, Grynzspan by name, shot a certain Herr von Rath, an official of the German Embassy in Paris. There were cynical people all over the place who stated that the young man had been incited to the deed by the group of Nazi agents provocateurs whose company it was known he had been frequenting for some weeks before the outrage. It was known that Herr von Rath was *persona ingrata* to his superiors. At all events, Berlin seized with both hands the opportunity it had been presented with, or had created. They determined to show the Bolshevistic Plutodemocratic leaders of World Jewry where (as the phrase is) they got off. A fine of five thousand million marks was imposed on the German Jews, and large numbers of the men-folk were clapped into concentration camps.

In the immediate world of Elsie Silver nothing happened. Brockenburg, as ever, frequented her company; he did not anticipate any Mr. Emmanuel embarrassments with respect to Grynzspan, who was no sweet bleating hang-over from her Doomington childhood. There was no more mention of Grynzspan than of the Governor of the State of Oregon, whoever he might be.

On the other hand, all over Germany there were a great many Jews of all grades of society who were in the direst straits. Now and again help was



reached out to them from the unlikeliest quarters; even professed Nazis gave a hand.

"When will I find a note in my handbag?" Elsie Silver asked herself from time to time. "Or will They ring up without warning?"

She found no note in her handbag, and They did not ring her up. She felt very cold and mean and lonely, in her luxurious apartment on the Stadtpark. It might have been a headland on the Labrador coast.

It was towards the end of that same year, 1938, that Brockenburg came to her late one night, sat himself on a chair before her, and laid his hands on her knees. He looked at that moment less like a lover than a kind but stern uncle.

"Elsie," he said, "they're fools. They may forge a sword out of that umbrella yet."

She yawned.

"I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about."

"There'll be war next year," he told her.

Her heart stopped.

"Against us?"

"Not against the British, against the Poles."

"What do you want me to do about it?" she murmured.

"I've just said—the British are fools. They never know when they're well off. We're pretty easy-going now. But if there's war——"

"My dear," she pouted. "I'm an Aryan, aren't I?"

"You're English," he said shortly.

"But there's not going to be any war against the English." She opened her eyes wide. "Only against the Poles."

He got up and strode up to the other end of the room; he was obviously struggling to keep down his temper. There had doubtless been words that day among the Big Boys. He came back to her and sat down again.

"If war breaks out, you won't be one of those they'll exchange for some little German governess from Kensington."

"I hope not. I hope they'll rate me higher than that."

"They will," he said sombrely. "You know too much."

"Well?"

"It's very lucky he's dead."

"My Bobbie, you mean. Poor little Bobbie!" She sighed.

"So we'll get married," he told her.

"We might as well," she said.

His hands were pressing in on the sides of her skull. Her mouth was like a blown rose.

"Let's get to bed!" he said. He was sometimes quite brutal.

So it was that Elsie Silver, one time Lady Malswetting, was Frau Obergruppenführer General von Brockenburg when the second World War broke out. The marriage had been celebrated quietly but with style. The Führer himself, as was said earlier, had signified his pleasure by sending the happy pair a portrait of himself.

The Herr General was with the troops in Poland when the British sent their perfidious ultimatum. With the troops he stayed during the years of triumph and the time of counter-thrust and thrust that followed. He was more of a soldier than a politician when he came to grips with himself. He was happy to be with the other old soldiers, his world war comrades, who had stuck to the Reichswehr throughout. The war was also a summary solution of his insoluble personal problems. He fled into active service.

His wife was a lonely woman. With Brockenburg away almost the whole time, the higher officials, both political and military, did not embarrass her with an excess of social invitations. Officials further down the ladder of the Nazi hierarchy, dazzled by her name, from time to time roped her into inspecting a provincial girls' brigade or distributing prizes at a charitable tombola in aid of bombed-out children. There would be a pretty scene; a tiny flaxen-haired maiden presenting with a curtsy a bouquet of flowers, the exalted Frau General making a charming little speech out of the side of a mouth pulled slightly awry, as if at any moment she was going to spit out a squirt of black tobacco-juice. These invitations, too, petered out fairly rapidly.

There was one occasion—this was quite early in the war—when she was asked to undertake a more serious job. An official from the German Rundfunk requested an interview and informed her that the Fatherland needed her services on the air. They had already enlisted the services of a Briton, a British patriot in the truest sense of the word, but according to intelligence received the British did not take him as seriously as they should. They called him by derisive names, Lord Hee-hee, Lord Haw-haw. Perhaps something was wrong with the gentleman's pronunciation or the quality of his voice. Everyone knew that the Frau General's voice was *echt silber*, pure silver. The gentleman tittered at his own witticism. Would it not be possible for the Frau General to take a hand and assist in the task of opening the eyes of their British cousins? The Fatherland had a soft spot in its heart for the unhappy deluded island beyond the Channel. For the sake both of her former and her present Fatherland . . .

There was a vase of flowers on a small table beside her. With that the Frau General clouted the official like a drunken barmaid. The behaviour was odious and inexcusable. The official wrote a long report to Herr Goebbels, who passed it on to Herr Himmler. What action did Herr



Himmler propose? For the time being Herr Himmler proposed no action. No further approach from any quarter was made to the Frau General.

The isolation, the unreality, the absurdity increased. She found herself now and again biting her exquisitely-tended finger-nails. Twice she smashed not merely a tea-cup, a coffee-cup, but a street window-pane. She was rich. There was nothing she could not have bought, or just acquired by the simple expedient of saying she wanted it. But she had nothing, not even air to breathe. Germany was an island, and she lived on an island within the island, in a glass sphere, a vacuum. She read no papers, and listened to no news, German or British, for news was lies, and did not in any case concern her.

She spent a lot of time trying to conserve her figure and her looks, though there were lamentable lapses into potatoes and cream and chocolates. She took violent exercise now and again. But the eyes and ears of her spirit, if spirit survived, were closed. Better sleep through this winter of war, she told herself, like a . . . like a . . . bear, is it, a sloth, a squirrel? It'll be spring again some time.

But it didn't work. Still there was nothing to *do*. Her nerves twittered like a roof-top thick with swallows. In the Berlin apartment she would suddenly realize she couldn't stand Berlin for another half-hour, and she would drive Brauner and Fanni stark mad packing her up for the villa near Baden-Baden in the Schwarzwald. When she got there, or even before she got there, the thought of the Schwarzwald became intolerable. She would choke if she didn't make off then and there, however odious it was to travel these days, to the château by Salzburg.

She liked the château. It wasn't too large, just eighteen rooms. It had a ghost, too, the ghost of the old Baron they had carted off to Dachau, who had died a year later. How much had Willy paid for the place? Fifteen pounds. For the house and the horses and the furniture and the carpets and the tapestries. Fifteen pounds. It was a bit naughty. But they were all like that; Willy wasn't worse than any of the others. And it was a nice place, with lots of fresh eggs about, and fresh milk.

Then suddenly the ghost got a bit troublesome. So did the Salzburger; their faces were like sides of beef. So off she trundled to Berlin.

Berlin, Baden, Salzburg. Salzburg, Berlin, Baden. She wasn't sleeping all curled up like a sloth, or a squirrel, or whatever it was. She was running round and round, round and round, like a white mouse in a cage.

She had felt it coming on her the moment she had crossed the threshold of the villa at Baden.

"Brauner!" she shouted. She had Brauner with her, of course. "Ring up the château in Salzburg. Tell Lisa to get the place ready. I'll be there in

two or three days, less maybe. What are you standing about for like an ox? Ring her up!"

On the evening of the next day she was on the telephone to the station-master at Baden. She did it herself this time. She liked making Brauner's life a misery to her, ordering her to pack large trunks only to unpack them, leaving her stranded in the middle of nowhere.

It was the Frau General von Brockenburg speaking. The Herr Station-master knew the voice. There was a shrill noise in his throat as if he had swallowed a whistle. The Herr Stationmaster was to see that a corner seat facing the engine was reserved for the Frau General at the frontier at Kehl. No, she'd be alone. Her woman would have to make arrangements for herself later. She wanted to be alone. It was to be a carriage with nice people, nobody that smelled. While he was about it, he could see to her transport from the villa to the station. Her own car had broken down. The whistle in the throat shrilled obediently.

*"Zu Befehl, gnädige Frau."*

It was not easy to reserve a seat on the German trains in the Spring of nineteen-forty-three or to keep it unoccupied after it had been reserved. It was done, somehow. "Who can it be," the passengers asked themselves, "they are keeping that seat for? Perhaps they had not been able to bring up a special train. Perhaps it might even be . . . it might even be . . ." They could not bring themselves to form the two syllables of the name.

But it was not that gentleman. It was a chic lady, with a veil three-quarters down her face, with one small week-end case and a smart Viennese handbag. With that bitter-sweet scent, she was like a blossoming lime-tree.

So the train set forth on its journey to Munich, and the air-raid siren went, and the bombs started falling, just as the train was passing through the outer suburbs. *Die verfluchten Engländer!*

### III

*Crump!*

That was too much of a good thing. The engine-driver put on his brake. The fore bumpers of every carriage clicked against the rear bumpers of the carriage in front. The wheels squealed. The train stopped.

*Crump!* There they go again! But further away this time, a bit to the north! That's better. Well? What's going to happen? Are we going to go on? Are we going to stay here? Where are we? In a station? In between stations? The engine spat and sniffed, as if it considered the whole proceeding in the worst possible taste.



Hello! There's somebody! What's that he's saying? It looks as if we're drawn up over against a platform. Somebody let a window down.

". . . can get down if they want to!" proclaimed an advancing voice. "The train will continue into the Hauptbahnhof! We're at Pasing Station! Passengers can get down if they want to!" the voice declared from alongside. "The train will continue . . ." the voice dwindled down the platform.

"Let me out! Let me out!" a woman cried out sharply from among the packed mass standing along the corridor. Room was apparently made for her. "Your bag, Elsa!" someone exclaimed. There was the sound of feet coming down on the platform up and along the line. The man with the slick hair suddenly caved in. "Let me out!" he cried. Somehow he was extruded both from the carriage and the corridor. Apparently they did not require a high standard of self-control in the Gestapo. The commercial gentleman wedged in among the feet between the seats groaned, but stayed where he was. The engine sniffed again, the wheels started revolving again. The military gentlemen sat stiff as ramrods. On the right-hand side of the line, a building was blazing fiercely. One of the military gentlemen jerked his head and jerked it back again, like a marionette.

"*Zollamt*," he said. "Customs House."

"*Jawohl*," the Herr General replied. The voices were loud. The barrage was deafening now. The train dragged on, hugging the ground with its belly, as it were, as if it might thus escape the attentions of the creatures overhead.

"*Endlich!*" someone murmured. "At last!"

Ahead the great girders of the main station curved downward like arms, as if ushering into safety the panting train, the train whose heart seemed to be knocking so violently against its ribs, at any moment it must burst and die. But of course there was no safety within those arms. Less there than anywhere.

#### IV

The wheels stopped revolving. The train was home in its berth. But there was not much comfort in that. The whole city seemed to be shaking like a beaten carpet. The ack-ack was deafening. The bombs seemed to be coming down with determination and precision on the station area. Along the platform stood a posse of officials, spaced, it seemed, at regular intervals. "Everyone to go down to the shelters at once!" they shouted. "Forward and to the right! Luggage to be attended to later!"

It was dark in the blacked-out station, except for the bluish lanterns that marked out the routes to the shelters, and the moving torches in the hands of



officials. It was dark and fearsome; the uproar seemed to blunder and ricochet from girder to girder within the dome like a flock of dazed birds that could find no outlet. It was as if some disastrous service were being conducted, by those dim altar-lamps, in the pealing of those monstrous organ-pipes.

And it was as orderly. The passengers dismounted from the trains, they moved off along the aisles, as if this were a routine rendered times without number, and the air-raid officials were priests into whose keeping they confided their souls and bodies.

"They're a wonderful people!" Elsie Silver murmured, as she moved along in the steady quadruple file. "It's like a parade-ground. Do they get born by numbers? Is there a drill for having a stomach-ache or an orgasm? Is that how they die?" The feet moved steadily forward. The cortège had reached the ticket-barrier; a blue lamp gleamed wanly three yards further, on the verge of the great entrance-hall. Another lamp gleamed ten yards away to the right. The officials were passing the people along, like goods on a conveyor-belt.

"This way to the shelter! This way!"

She had emerged from the barrier. She was aware suddenly she did not want to go along with these others down into the shelter. She resented being jockeyed along this way, like cattle towards the cattle-pens. It was disgusting to live, if it wasn't you living any more, but a heifer with a rope in its nose. She stood a moment over against the man at the lantern, her feet square on the ground.

"Come, come!" said the man. "That way! Get moving!" She did not move. The blood was pounding in her pulses. "*Zum Teufel!*" the man muttered, and pushed her back into the moving queue. She felt her cheeks blaze like shavings into which a match is dropped. "Your filthy hands off!" she shouted, and lunged back at him with both her hands. A moment later she was beyond him, over to the left. The queue moved on soberly. "This way to the shelter! This way!" the voices of the *Kleinbeamten*, the small officials, persisted.

But by now she was away on the other side of the entrance hall, the side towards the Luisenstrasse. She was out of the station now, out in the open street, in the din of the cannonade, the bombs, the flares, the incendiaries, the shrapnel falling, the roofs falling. She was running like a schoolgirl who has been kept in after school, but she is like a hind in the meadows because she is running to her love.

It was like meadows, and it was like the sea-shore, with a great wind battering the dunes and now and again a wave is lifted towards you and topples over and slaps your face with the wind of its collapse. But the water



and wind are flame and your hair and your clothes are scorched in it. And your cheeks are blazing, and your eyes, too; you have lost your chic little Paris hat with the trim veil, so your hair flows out behind you, and that too is like flame, each separate strand of it. You have never in all your life been so happy before, never so happy.

For you are going out to meet your love, your boy-friends, all the dozens of them. What grand kids they are, how little you have deserved of them, and how they are ready to give you that one Thing you crave for so infinitely more than emerald necklaces, and Cartier ruby clips, and even Schrafft's chocolates in an embossed gold casket, and pressed duck you once had with Bobbie Malswetting at the Tour d'Argent and *Rahmschnitzel* you and Oskar had together in the Goldene Krone at Mittenwald in the Zillerthal!

You never loved Bobbie, though he was very nice to look on, with his peach-bloomy skin and his silky little Vandyke beard. And you loved Oskar, you still love him, you will always love him. You saw him before you ever set eyes on him, and you can see him now in the white sizzling flare this canister of incendiaries is making here in the . . . I think it must be the Königsplatz. Is it you, Oskar? You don't seem a bit happy. What job have they wished on you? You ought to tidy up your side-whiskers, they're all over the place. You're not a bit like yourself.

Of course you loved Oskar, and you love him now, Elsie, and you'll always love him. (That wasn't Oskar, at all, behind the flame. Of course it wasn't. It was an air-raid warden. Get down to an air-raid shelter? Me? Go and boil yourself in oil!) You'll always love potatoes mashed with cream, Elsie, and swansdown slippers, and facial massages, and Oskar.

But these boys, Oskar, they are England, they are Doomington. They bring me death, the Way Out!

(She opened out her arms to them, to the 'planes drumming desperately in the remote vault of the heavens. She heard a bomb coming down, and halted in her onset, and stood there, her heels on the ground, and lifted her arms to the bomb. "Here I am!" she cried. "It's me! Elsie! I'm waiting for you!" But it was not with Elsie that bomb had any business to do. The blast of it from the further corner of the next block hit her full in the stomach and winded her, so that she crouched there gasping, her eyes full of tears and her mouth of laughter. "Better luck next time, boys!" she cried. "Give me some idea where you're making for, won't you?")

They are England, these boys. I used to know them when I was a girl, Oskar. Or to tell the truth, not these same boys. We're getting on a bit, you and I. It was their fathers I used to know. They were reet devils, that's what they were, as we used to say in Lancashire. The liberties they wouldn't take with a girl! Touch her up in front, try and pinch her in the bottom! Regular cautions! I used to sing for them in the last war. Once in the



Woodbine Hut, in the Harfleur Valley . . . the Doomingtons were in for a spell from the trenches. Half Magnolia Street was there. What a time we had! There's a long, long trail a winding . . .

Hello, Les, is that you? Is that you? Young Les, I mean! I used to know your old man. He came from Openshaw. One time when it was pelt-ing cats and dogs, there he was outside the stage-door of the old Tivoli, with a bunch of roses in his hand, like a masher of the nineties, with Dundreary whiskers. He was a boiler-maker, I think. He was a *pet*. Soaked to the skin he was; so I took him back to the old kitchen in Oleander Street, and there they all were, the dear old anarchists, God bless them, drinking tea-with-lemon. And I made him take off his jacket and shirt. He had a fine chest, like marble. There wasn't half a to-do among the anarchists. So respectable they were . . .

Hello, Les, young Les! It *must* be you! Can you come down any closer than that? Are you off again? No, not over there! Here! Here! Come along, darlings! You're Death. You're the Way Out. I don't *want* to go back again.

But Les and Gerry and Dick and Frank, the lads from Doomington, from Birmingham, from Cape Town and Montreal, and all over the place—they had no packet marked with Elsie Silver's name. There was no help for it. She had to go back again.

She realized she was quite near the station, by the time she came to her senses again, so to speak. She must have gone round in a circle, as one always does when one is a bit excited.

She had quite a bit of trouble getting into the station, it was cordoned off. There had been a direct hit on a train in a siding, with the people just getting out, too. So she had to bring out who she was—"Frau General von Brockenburg!" she declaimed, like Sarah Bernhardt or Mrs. Siddons. They didn't quite know whether she was a bomb-crazed Hausfrau—she didn't look as elegant as earlier in the day—or the Frau General, as she said. But she still had her small handbag, which had her ticket for Salzburg, so they let her through.

There was quite a lot going on in the front hall of the station, ambulance workers and stretchers and people moaning and hoses being played on a burning train.

Her heart stopped.

"My God!" she cried out. She seized somebody by the arm. "Tell me! The train from Baden and Augsburg! That's not the one they've hit, is it?"

"No," the man replied. "Let go!"

"Which platform is it?"

He wouldn't tell her. She had to find out for herself. She managed to

Acc. No.  
2046



get through. The train was still there, the carriage she had travelled in was still there, the second from the engine, she remembered. Her heart was knocking so frantically, she could hardly breathe.

She reached at last the corner seat she had been sitting in, and felt round among the cushions frantically.

"Oh, thank God!" she gasped.

It was there, the Vienna handbag, and the gold casket of chocolates inside it. She helped herself to a large and juicy one, ate it delicately, then wiped her mouth with care.

Then she got up, went up to the door and addressed somebody out there on the platform. It might well be a porter.

"You there!" she said. "Take my bag along! I want the train for Salzburg!"

There was a good deal of dislocation on the lines. It was not till late next afternoon that the Frau General arrived at the little château in Salzburg. Peppi, the Baron's old retainer, with the long green coat and the Franz Josef beard, was waiting for her at the station. He had been waiting a day and a half. Lisa was waiting on the doorstep.

"Frau General!" Lisa wailed. "Your fur jacket! It's all burned! Your skirt, too——"

"Take me up!" Elsie demanded thickly. Her eyes felt like fur mittens. "Not bedroom. Sitting-room. Too tired."

She staggered into the sitting-room, and let Lisa take the jacket off. Then she threw herself on to the big divan. "Draw curtains!" she demanded. "Nobody to disturb, nobody!" Lisa pushed a couple of cushions under her head. A second later she did not exist any more.

## CHAPTER TWO

THE telephone rang at eleven next morning. It was a trunk call.

"The name's Mack," the man said. "Oberscharführer Mack. Who's that? The housekeeper? I'm Oberscharführer Mack of the personal staff of his Excellency the Obergruppenführer, and General of the S.S., Brockenburg. Put me through immediately to the Frau General! What? She's asleep? Put me through all the same! Get her up at once! Impossible? Well, it must be possible! I have an extremely urgent personal message!"

"Sir, Herr Oberscharführer, please don't shout! I have the strictest instructions not to——"

"Hell! I must talk to the Frau General *now*! I'm speaking from Party

Headquarters in Munich. I've tried to get the Frau General at the Berlin house. Then they told me she was at the villa in Baden-Baden. I had a hell of a time getting through to Baden-Baden. All the telephone lines in Western Germany have gone crazy. And at Baden-Baden they told me she left for Salzburg. Will you get her for me, or won't you?"

"Perhaps if the Herr Oberscharführer rings up this afternoon——"

The man's voice on the telephone changed. The bluster went out of it.

"I *must* talk to her," he said gravely. "It's a matter of life and death. Wait a moment." Presumably he looked at his watch. "It's eleven o'clock. She's had her sleep now. I'll ring off and ring again at half-past eleven. What? What? She'll still be asleep? But I tell you—Hello!" There had been a click at the other end of the line. "Hello! Hello! Goddam bitch!" He clapped the receiver down.

Over in the château Lisa waited for some half-minute, then she lifted the receiver again and laid it down beside the telephone.

"Now he can ring his head off!" she muttered with tight lips. "The pig-snout!" She did not particularly care for Oberscharführers and people of that sort, since the death of Hansl, her husband. They had trained him as a parachutist for the conquest of England, where he had been a waiter in Brighton for some years, before he returned to Germany to marry Lisa and take up his job with Elsie in the Stadtpark flat. But for one reason or another the conquest of England had not come off, so they dropped him over Stalingrad, instead. No, she didn't like Oberscharführers in general, and she strongly disapproved of this one in particular, the way he bawled into the telephone, just outside the room where the Frau General was sleeping, dog-tired after that awful journey. Lisa was tiptoeing away towards the kitchen, when a sleepy voice called out to her from the sitting-room.

"Lisa! Is that you? What's going on?"

Lisa bit her lips.

"Damn!" she said. "He's wakened her. Now she'll give me hell all day. Coming, Excellency!" she called out. She opened the door soundlessly, shut it behind her and crept towards the curtains. They were heavy curtains, cream-coloured. They did not keep the light out entirely, but it was a good enough black-out for Austria, the haven of the bombed-out.

"No, leave them!" bade the Frau General. "What a head I've got! That was the telephone, wasn't it? Why didn't you disconnect it? Who was it?"

"Begging your pardon, Excellency!" said Lisa. "I'm sorry, Excellency! That was Oberscharführer Mack. He insisted on talking to you. It was urgent, he said. He was shouting like a van-driver. I have left the telephone off, Excellency!"

Elsie groaned, and turned her head from the curtains.



"You should have done that before! Oh, my head! Lisa, ring up the stables. I might ride later on today. No, not today, tomorrow. What is there to eat in the house? A duck? I couldn't face a duck. A tender little roast chicken, maybe. There aren't any chickens? Tell them there'd better be. What? Who did you say? Mack?" The face and shoulders of the man suddenly darkened against the jiggling kaleidoscope behind her eyes. Mack. He wasn't one of the better-looking ones, but he was a male, at any rate. "What did he want to talk to me about? Didn't you ask him? Did you say you took the receiver off? Go out at once, and put it back. My God, I'm bored! I must talk to someone. Go and draw the curtains a bit and open one of the windows. A little fresh air might do me good. That fur jacket, Lisa, on the old Herr Baron's chair—you can have it. You can easily have a new piece put in where it's burned. What did he want? You have no idea? Tell her not to make any more of that cream tart. It's fatal. My God, I'm so bored! I think I'll switch on to London. Switch on for me; don't be frightened. News? I don't want news. I want to listen to one of those idiotic variety shows. That's right. Oh, switch off. Go away. Get me some coffee, will you? And bring me my slimming pills. Hello! There it is again!" The telephone bell rang out in the hall. "Well, go along and answer it. Don't be all day. Who is it?" shouted the Frau General. "Mack again? Put him through. Yes, I'm in. I'm up. Put him through."

"Hello, Herr Oberscharführer, is that you?" The voice had a different timbre. It had lost the nagging petulance. It was soft and husky and dove-like, the man-voice. They had known it well once in the Kurfürstendamm, and still knew it on gramophone-records all over Germany. "It's awfully sweet of you to ring up. You must have guessed how bored I was." He was trying to cut in, but she would not let him. She went murmuring on out of her tree-top, but she felt her fright beating like a pulse in her throat. What the hell *was* he ringing up about? It must be something to do with Willy. What was wrong with Willy? Had they caught up on Willy at last? . . .

. . . don't talk such nonsense, Elsie. You're mad . . .

"Where are you, Herr Mack? Don't you think you could get over tonight? The Herr General wouldn't say a *thing*! We'll have a jolly little meal here, and go out and tickle up the high spots. There are still one or two left, you know, out here in Salzburg. What? What's that you're saying? *I'm* not stopping you! Go ahead! What's on your mind?"

"The Frau General must be serious. I have grave news."

"Well, well, what is it? You can't talk on the telephone? What the devil do you ring me up for? Come along now, stop fooling. There's something wrong with the General, isn't there? I'm not a hysterical school-girl. You can't tell me? Where are you now? You're on your way here?"



What, you just wanted to make sure that I . . . All right, all right. What? Half an hour? I'll expect you in half an hour. If you . . . I say . . . Hello, Hello . . ." She banged down the hook of the receiver three or four times. He was gone.

She got up as agilely from the couch as a woman half her age. "Put on a hot bath at once, Lisa. Lay out the grey costume. You can take this suitcase upstairs and . . . no, don't unpack it yet. Maybe I'll want it as it is. I may have to go to Berlin at once. Have the new hats arrived I had sent from Helpmann's?" She was on her way to her bathroom upstairs, Lisa following dizzily, flapping her hands as her custom was, when the Frau General went stark staring mad as now. "Get me the red one. No, not *now*. Put the bath on first. Did I order a small toque, dark blue? That's the one I'll have. The Pine Essence, you fool! There must be a box of the General's Havanah cigars somewhere if the chauffeur hasn't stolen them. Ow! More cold water, clumsy! Is there any money in the house? Well, get out my jewel-case. I'll take a few things in my handbag, it might be useful!" The instructions followed Lisa like a rattle of bullets from a machine-gun post that has lost its senses.

But the woman that received Herr Oberscharführer Mack some twenty-five minutes later was a very different creature, quietly dressed, composed, determined, soberly efficient. The car came roaring up the drive at a mad pace, its exhaust roaring. A colossal driver in the uniform of the Waffen-S.S. was at the wheel. The Oberscharführer was a large fat man, with a spongy face, bespectacled, of the Nazi intellectual type, but looking tough enough in his tight black uniform, the pistols in the holster, the polished black leggings. He stepped out of the car while it was still in motion.

The Frau General wasted no time in pleasantries.

"In here," she said. She led him into the sitting-room. "What's it all about?" She did not ask him to sit down.

"Is your suitcase packed?" the man asked.

"Yes. What's wrong?"

"There's been an accident."

"Is he hurt? Dead?" She placed the tips of her fingers on his sleeve.

"Dead, probably. We don't know yet. His 'plane crashed, this morning about ten."

"Where?"

"Somewhere near Warsaw. He was on his way back from a conference at the Führer's headquarters. That's all I know. What about that suitcase of yours?"

"It's ready. I'll just get my coat. We fly to Warsaw?"

"We fly," the man said grimly. "But not to Warsaw. Frau General!"

He clicked his heels. "I have orders to put you over the Swiss border at once."

She stared him straight in the eyes.

"Whose orders?"

"General von Brockenburg's."

"What are you talking about? He ordered me to be put over the Swiss border? When? How?"

"Listen, Frau General," the man said sombrely. "I'd advise you not to ask too many questions. Take your things and come."

"I'm not a fool, you know; and not a baby, either."

"Honestly, Frau General, there's not much I could tell you in any case. I just got news of the crash by telephone this morning. I don't see what you need to go into things for. You know as well as I do that there are—how shall I put it?—there are certain groups, certain divergencies, even among the best patriots. I give you my word, the message I got on the telephone was very fragmentary. It's not easy to say much on the long-distance wire. The only thing I know is—look here, Frau General, I would like you to trust me—I am . . . I was . . . really devoted to the General. There are some of us who'd always give their very lives for him. I'm one of them. The same goes for the man who 'phoned me . . . Getzler, the Adjutant, if you want to know. Getzler was in a good deal of a hurry. As I told you, the General seems to have been summoned to a conference at the Führer's headquarters yesterday. There's nothing strange about that. These conferences go on all the time . . . though the General hadn't been asked to attend very often during the last few months." The man looked round, as if he feared he was talking too much. There was someone listening at the door, perhaps.

"It's all right," the Frau General said curtly. "Go on."

He lowered his voice.

"You mustn't think the General had any premonitions in connection with this particular journey. It appears it's been a standing instruction to the Adjutant ever since the outbreak of the war and the General went off to the front."

"What? Make yourself clear!"

"I mean . . . in case anything happened to the General . . . at the first report, without any further inquiry or delay for any reason at all, we were to see to it that you were flown to Switzerland at once."

She stamped her foot angrily.

"Why, man, why?"

The Oberscharführer shrugged his shoulders. His face was a mask.

"We mustn't lose any time standing around here, talking. There's a 'plane leaving Salzburg for Innsbruck and Zurich at 3 p.m."

"But, my good man, even if I were a little woman that you can tie up in



string and send off by parcel post—and you'll find out I'm not—you haven't any idea what's happened to him. He might be . . . not dead at all, for all you know."

"If he isn't dead, you can always come back in a day or two. According to my instructions——"

She stepped close to him and stared straight into his face.

"Now listen. I don't know what sort of women you're used to. Or rather, I *do* know; I've lived in this country long enough. Well, I'm not one of them. You know what *I* am. Don't blush! It doesn't suit you at all. If he's dead, and if I've got to leave, I'll leave. But not before I know why and how. Do you see? So find out. Get to work, and find out!"

"What do you want?" His voice was rough and raw. "A death certificate?" She sat down, but did not take her eyes off his face. She said not a word. "All right, all right," he said uncomfortably. "Where's the telephone?"

She pointed it out. He took up the receiver.

"Service call S.S. Give me Munich." He gave a number, and stood waiting. "Heil Hitler!" he brought out a minute or so later. "Is that you, Kurt? Yes, it's me. What? No. She won't." A pause. "Yes, that's what I told her. She won't until . . . Have you got any further news?" He listened. His expression did not change. "Yes, yes. No? I'll be damned! Hang on!" he said. Receiver in hand, he turned to the Frau General. "This is Bergmann. I think you know him. While I was driving he got through to Warsaw. The General was brought to Warsaw three hours ago, to a private nursing home. He was in a dying condition. The doctors gave him an hour or two. He's presumably dead by now." He paused a moment, then he added impassively: "Are you coming?"

"Ring up Warsaw!" she ordered.

"Frau General," the man said quietly, "I've a great deal of admiration for your courage. But don't you really know you'd better be out of Germany if——"

"Herr Mack," she said, "ring up that Warsaw nursing home."

A flare of temper flickered in his cheeks. He turned and shouted into the receiver.

"Still there, Bergmann! Hell take it! Get me the goddam number of that goddam nursing home! Get them to call me back!" He banged down the receiver.

"Don't lose your temper, Herr Mack," requested the Frau General. "It'll take some time. What about a spot of lunch?"

"You must forgive me, Frau General. You're the most exasperating woman in the world." He laughed against his will. "Have you a radio here? The news will be on in a few minutes. Maybe there'll be something



about . . .” He went over to the set; then he looked at the dial, raising his eyebrows. “Frau General,” he said drily, “if you *must* listen to London, you’d better turn the knob when you’ve finished.” A pulse started throbbing visibly in the side of his temple. “Shameless!” he brought out. “If it weren’t for my devotion to the General . . .” He looked at her sourly, and did not finish the sentence.

The telephone rang; he lifted the receiver.

“Warsaw? Yes? Is that the nursing home? What? What the hell are you talking about? This is Oberscharführer Mack, of the General’s personal staff! What do you say? What? Oh! Nothing to be done? What?” But they had obviously cleared the line at the other end. He put the receiver down slowly. Then he turned. His face was like a mess of starch. “They won’t connect,” he brought out. “They refuse to connect.” He looked about him unsteadily. “There’s something wrong over there.” He took out a handkerchief to wipe his forehead. “Maybe I’d better go with you to Munich for a day or two.” His eyes seemed to be popping out of his head. He was very much shaken up. “You never know—— What is it? What do you want?”

The Frau General was over at the telephone. She lifted the receiver briskly.

“Operator? Get me the air-port! At once!” She waited.

“What are you up to?” Herr Mack asked, his chin sagging.

“Is that the air-port? Fine! This is Frau General von Brockenburg. What’s the best way for me to get to Warsaw? Change at Vienna? And when is there a ’plane to Vienna? Just leaving? Hold it back! Yes, hold the ’plane back for about twenty minutes. I take full responsibility. Orders of Obergruppenführer General von Brockenburg. Yes, I’ll give it you in writing as soon as I’m there! And will you please ring through to Vienna at once to make sure there’s priority accommodation held for me? What? How many?” She gave a quick glance at Herr Mack. “Just one! I’ll be alone!”

Herr Mack took the receiver out of her hand.

“Hi!” he shouted. “This is Oberscharführer Mack of General von Brockenburg’s personal staff. Book two seats, not one! What? No more seats? Who’s booked them? Civilians? Throw them out! I say, throw them out! I’ll be going with the Frau General!” His face was red with fury as he banged down the receiver. He turned and looked at her malevolently. “It’s on your own head, Frau General!”

She smiled at him.

“You might as well keep your temper,” she counselled him. “Lisa!” she called out. “My coat!”

But Lisa was in the room before the words had left her lips.

"Frau General!" Lisa said. "It's on the wireless!"

"What?" she asked. She raised her hand to her heart.

"He must be all right. The Führer's just given him a decoration, the finest there is."

"The Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross? Was that it?" asked Herr Mack icily.

"Yes, that was it!" Lisa nodded.

Herr Mack shook his head violently, as if he were getting rid of a bat that had landed on his skull.

"That's what they all get when . . . when . . ." The words petered out on his lips.

"Let's get going!" cried Elsie. "Bring the things to the car, Lisa!"

"Good-bye, Excellency!" Lisa blubbered. "When, please, will she be back?" She appealed to the Oberscharführer. He took not the least notice.

"Good-bye, Lisa!" breathed Elsie. She let her lips rest for a moment on Lisa's cheek; then tumbled back in the seat as the car roared off.

### CHAPTER THREE

WE go forward in time a day or two. Elsie Silver has left the château by Salzburg. We go in space a considerable distance, north-eastward, some five hundred miles as the crow flies. We are in Poland, in the Mazovian Plain, in the humpy soggy country between the rivers, the Vistula and the Bug. Warsaw lies some fifty miles westward. Nearer, but still far enough, is the wilting town of Brok. Between us and Brok, close at hand, a long marsh seethes and seeps, thirty forlorn miles of it. A couple of miles to the south of us, beyond a precarious wood of firs and pines, lies the small village of Budojec. There is not much of it—a wooden church, one street, a general store, some fifty or sixty houses all told, if you can call them houses.

We are in the homestead of one Woinarski, his first name being Bronislas; Bronek they call it. It is a two-roomed hovel: one room a kitchen, one a bedroom. The walls are mud, in the living-room there is a mud oven with its opening on the kitchen side of the separating wall. There is a painted chest against one wall, and a large bed against the other. There are one or two hempen rugs hanging up, there is an oleograph of the Virgin above the bedhead. In the kitchen there is an oven, a hanging pot, a couple of low rough-hewn benches, and a cupboard with a loaf of rye bread and a roll of smoked cheese. On a ledge is a bowl with some eggs elaborately painted, for this is the Easter time. The last frost has been a month ago. The earth is



soggy with the long thaw. The rivulets are running hither and thither among the potato-roots.

It is a lonely place. There is only one other small farm, a quarter-of-a-mile away, between Bronek's place and Budojec. The Polish peasants like to huddle their houses together under the church, so that they feel there's someone to give a hand, in case the Virgin fails, as sometimes she does. Bronek's place is lonely, but he is a big shambling creature, like his fathers before him, he is able to look after himself, with those huge hands, and that gorilla-like chin. He is able to look after himself, that is to say, against ordinary human beings, like himself, or you or me. But there's not much he can do when it comes to Commissions and Inquisitions and Requisitions, and hand over so many sacks of potatoes, and you won't need that horse any more, and if we let you keep those fowls, we'll expect so many eggs, and milk so much, rye so much. That's not the work of ordinary human beings. They're a sort of devils, worse than those that sometimes pull your hair in the dark, or make the fresh milk sour—a lot worse. Nazis their name is. The place is crawling with them ever since they dropped out of the skies, like cockroaches, brown and shiny, or black and shiny, in the Autumn of nineteen hundred and thirty-nine. They're well-scrubbed, shining with soap, yet they carry a smell about with them like crushed cockroaches—no, bed-bugs. It is a good thing to crush them, till the blood spurts against walls—but that is not easy. It is dangerous.

It must be well after two o'clock on the morning of that sixteenth day of April nineteen hundred and forty-three. There are three people in Bronek's house. Bronek's wife, Maria, lies snoring on the bed in the other room. Bronek himself and his daughter, Anna, are in the kitchen. They are sitting on a low bench facing the door, which stands ajar. They have both been up all last night, and a good deal of tonight, too. He is dozing off. Anna is wide-awake.

She is worried, because she has been expecting a visitor and he—or it—has not turned up yet. It was to turn up either last night, or tonight, and the hours of darkness are slipping by. What will happen if it does not turn up by the dawning-time? Should she stay? Should she move on? It is not an easy thing to decide; the longer she stays the longer she compromises this good Bronek, this peasant who has been useful before, and should be preserved in order that he might be useful again. What is the point of moving on without the parcel? She has words to give them, it is true, over there in Warsaw. But they doubtless have words enough of their own. They need things now.

Anna is the daughter of Bronek and Maria. That is to say her name would be Anna if she were really their daughter. The real Anna slipped off



into the marshes about midnight, an hour or two after the horseman led this other young woman to Bronek's threshold. For if somebody came snooping around, it would not do for two young women to be about Bronek's place, when it was known that only one lived there, his daughter. They might start asking questions, and however clever anybody was, it might be found out that one of them was, in fact, a Russian, not a Pole. And that would mean much unpleasantness to everyone.

So the real Anna slipped off into the marshes, where she would be able to look after herself; she would be coming back again when the Russian girl moved on.

The name of the Russian girl was Tania—Tania Poledniknova to put down her paternal name, though she much preferred to forget it. It could almost be said she had forgotten it, so much had happened to her since she had last set eyes on her father, particularly during these last two years.

But it wasn't only for that reason she had practically succeeded in forgetting her father's name. It was a name best forgotten, if you could manage it. He was her father, it is true. But what does father-sentiment count in comparison with one's duty to the Revolution?

He had played his part in the early days, of course. So had Trotsky and Zinoviev (if one could bring oneself to enunciate those names even in the privacy of one's mind). So had Sokolnikov and Radek. But sooner or later the fatal bacillus had entered the blood-stream, the bacillus of deviationism, heresy, Fascist treachery.

So one way and another they had to be liquidated, those who did not seek to get away, but shamelessly stayed behind to receive and implement the directives conveyed to them across the frontiers. Some received varying sentences of exile and imprisonment. Boris Polednik was one of these. He was still in his log-hut in some remote prison-camp in the northern wastes, for anything his daughter, Tania, knew to the contrary. Perish the enemies of the Revolution!

When Polednik was sentenced, Tania was about thirteen, a scholar at the big October Technical College in Kiev. She was a precocious child and had been sent packing from her parents' apartment in Moscow some years earlier. It might have been one of several Technical Colleges, but her mother contrived that it should be Kiev, largely because her own family had come from those regions, though she herself, Susan Polednikova, had been born and brought up in England, the daughter of a Doornington tailor, Sam Silver by name. It was not merely an act of gross sentimentality but of downright foolishness to send the youngster back to the Dnieper, for Susan Polednikova's people had been the sort of people one isn't proud of; they had been *kulaks*, food-hoarders, they had had to be shot during the Civil War troubles as an example to the countryside. There was even a story that the



Polednikova woman had tried to get in the way of the shooting—an unsavoury story.

However, young Tania had not shown any retrogressive tendencies. During the trial she had behaved well, though it had not been an easy time, for the radio had it all day and every day, directly from the court-room and in recordings, the fiery speeches of the Public Prosecutor, the confessions of the Fascist criminals—and everybody had to listen. She had gone through the ordeal unflinchingly. She was aware that more eyes than she saw were studying her. The authorities approved. Things went on for her as before. She became an ardent member of the Comsomol.

But she did not see either her father or her mother again, the father because he was liquidated, and the mother because she was sent to a succession of office jobs in Leningrad, Kiubishev and elsewhere. The authorities apparently felt that though the woman was sentimental and foolish, she was probably not dangerous. It is true she was the sister of a woman who was intimate with a leading personage in one of the major Fascist countries. But that was never brought up, not even in the processes against her husband. There was no point in setting foot, until for one reason or another it might be advisable, on ground so delicately explosive.

No. Polednikova's family connections were not brought up. It was not she, but Polednik, that had been the dangerous one, hiding beneath a mask of revolutionary conformity the wolfish Fascism of the Trotskyite. Madame Polednikova's command of English—for she was English, as has been said—was an asset worth holding on to. She did a good deal of broadcasting in English later. Her daughter was sometimes to hear her mother's voice again—but she was not to set eyes on her. The German armies were in between, and the width of Occupied Russia. Later there was half the width of Occupied Poland. There was also the Wall of the Ghetto of Warsaw.

When the Germans stormed Kiev the young woman was twenty years old. She had gone on to the study of Natural Science and was working on a paper entitled: "Why is the Mendelian System Unscientific from the Point of View of Dialectical Materialism?" When they actually entered the house she was in, she was engaged in less abstruse studies; she was applying a splint to a small boy's fractured leg, for she had had training as a nurse. They put a bayonet through the belly of the small boy, for he had a curved nose and they mistook him for a Jew. She herself had the rather thin plume-like nose of her mother, slightly tip-tilted, so they gave her the benefit of the doubt and carried her off to the Emergency Hospital to do some nursing. She did not betray herself as an intellectual or a Comsomol, so they did not shoot her, she went on nursing till they moved the hospital further eastward nearer the fighting. When that happened, it was not thought worth while to move the native nurses forward; they were unreliable. So some were shot,



the rest put into a military brothel. Once again she was lucky. She had inherited her mother's lanky, almost Anglo-Saxon limbs, too, and the German soldiers like their harlots plump. So she was earmarked for slave labour in Germany, and even managed to escape castration.

She did not reach Germany. The cattle train she was travelling in was stopped in its tracks some five or six hours after it had left Kiev, by a grenade dexterously flung at the engine by a guerilla expert. There was a good deal of shooting and killing and swearing in the pitch-blackness, but a good many of the labour prisoners escaped and disappeared into the surrounding woods.

Tania Polednik was one of these. She was a good girl, intelligent, ardent, with a fine constitution. She attained quite a reputation as a guerilla fighter in those regions. That is to say a young woman named "Raven" achieved a reputation. From the moment she had got away from the train, she had not let the sound of her real name leave her lips. She did not utter it, nobody asked for it. "Raven" her name was. She had been a good shot for years. She became, in her turn, an expert in the manufacture and use of the so-called "sticky" grenade. They heard about her further back. In March, nineteen hundred and forty-three, she received orders to make her way from occupied Russian territory to occupied Polish territory.

It was a grandiose journey, some four hundred miles as the crow flies to her indicated destination, but nearer five hundred by the way she must travel. The first stage of her journey was from the marshes on the left bank of the Dnieper to the marshes east of Pinsk. This stage of the journey was done by aeroplane. There a mounted guerilla picked her up, and with him she rode to the region of the marshes east and south of Lukow, on the Bug. She was then handed over to a member of the Gruschka gang, which at that time was raiding the widely scattered garrisons and block-houses in that area, from the forests that stretched interminably north-eastward from Brok. The Gruschka fighter and the horseman worked out the time when the young woman could be delivered at her destination. The horseman returned to his headquarters, Raven was brought early one morning to the threshold of Bronislas Woinarski, at his house some two miles north of the village of Budojec. The understanding was that on the night of her arrival an aeroplane would drop a canister by parachute. If it failed to arrive that night, it would arrive the next night. The canister would contain a load of baratol, the pale yellow crystal which they press into hand-grenades, some two ounces per grenade. She would be able to carry off some twenty pounds of it. With the stuff sewn up into flat bags suspended from her middle and concealed under the voluminous petticoats they supplied her with in the Pinsk marshes, she would make her way to Warsaw and the Ghetto. The other agents coming after her would each tackle his own problem. Others were on their way. Some had already arrived there.



But the girl comrade called "Raven" has not yet left the hut in Budojec. Her mother's sister, Elsie Silver, Frau General von Brockenburg, has not yet arrived in Warsaw. Here in the dark kitchen Raven sits on the low bench, straining forward, her elbows on her knees. She is more at ease in a woodland ditch, with the boughs of a bush tied down to hold the weather out, and a tree-root for her pillow.

It is the second night, and it is very late. The aeroplane has not come yet. There have been aeroplanes enough, but they have been the aeroplanes of the Nazis flying high east or west, passing over. There has been no aeroplane flying low, circling, finding its bearings.

A word breaks the silence, one word. It is the old man who ejects it, without rancour, without much emotion in fact, as if it were a spit of tobacco-juice.

"Jews!" proclaims Bronek from his bench.

Raven makes the clicking noise against the teeth.

"Tut! Tut!"

She turns on her hips and kicks. She is rather stiff. At this moment she has other things to think about than Jews. Jews are going to come later. It is clear that Jews are biting Bronek again. It is not that Bronek particularly dislikes Jews; not that he likes them, of course. He is a good straightforward peasant, Raven considers, the basic stuff of the coming agrarian revolution in Poland, if the Nazis are going to leave any of them alive. And they must leave *some* alive, if only to chop wood for them, and dig ditches. Bronek is just as capable of smashing in a Jewish skull or two as the Russian mouzhik used to be, in the bad old priest-ridden capital-rotten days. First they get him drunk, then they get him more drunk. All the time they are murmuring in his ear: "It's the Jews' fault, the Jews' fault," or "They've got all the money already. Soon they'll have the shirt off your back. Why not go out and have some fun?" murmur Mr. Priest and Mr. Money-Bags. "Fill up that glass again, won't you?" So Bronek gets roaring drunk and goes out and smashes a couple of Jewish skulls, and burns down a synagogue, maybe. Then he comes round again, like old Ivan Ivanovitch, and blinks, and crosses himself, and feels a bit ashamed of himself.

"Jews!" says Bronek again in the darkness.

It isn't that he wants to go out skull-smashing. There's no drink, to begin with, and in these parts there's no Jews, except dead ones. He merely thinks that it's silly of this young woman and her comrades to be running all these dangers in order to get to the Warsaw Ghetto with explosives and things in the belief that the Jews will fight.

"Jews don't fight!" Bronek has told Raven more than once during these two days. "Do sheep fight?" he adds rhetorically. "In the name of



Christ!" he growls. That is quite a lot of eloquence for Bronek. They don't talk much, these peasants.

Raven takes note. It is almost as if she were sitting at her desk in the College at Kiev, with a note-book before her, and a pencil in her mouth. We are confronted with a manifestation of the phenomenon called anti-Semitism. See pages so-and-so in manual so-and-so. A social malady that once existed in Russia, too, but now wiped out; a punishable offence; ex-anti-Semites of Czarist times have been re-educated. Phenomenon rife among the Fascist enemy, and in the nature of the case prevalent throughout capitalist countries, e.g. Poland. For their own ends education of proletarians sabotaged, so they still remain illiterates, anti-Semites, etc. The opportunity should be taken, Raven decides, to enlighten Comrade Woinarski. She addresses him like a patient teacher handling a backward child.

"Why do you say Jews don't fight, comrade?"

He scratches his head, clears his throat, scratches his head again. The little woman, what should she know about Jews? He knows them, he's seen them with his own eyes die by the thousands. Like flies in autumn, shovel-loads, dying, dead. That's how much fight they've got in them. Beyond the woods there, in the big German receiving camp, he'd seen trainloads of them arrive, piled on top of one another like roots, dead a long time before they were unloaded. He'd had to give a hand in burying them, he and his two women and every peasant in the neighbourhood. There'd been such a stench from over there, the peasants had abandoned the fields for a five-mile radius.

"Jews!" He spits again. "Dead flies by the bushel! You want to make Jews fight?"

She is patient with him. She knew she would come up against the phenomenon of anti-Semitism sooner or later. She thinks it will be useful to bring out a few facts; her manner is slightly doctrinaire, even a little self-satisfied. But it is uphill work, for she talks very little Polish, and he less Russian. He didn't talk Russian even when Budojec was Russian territory, before the other war. Listen, comrade, in the Socialist Fatherland, Jew or non-Jew, it makes no difference. In the Red Army and the Partisan Units how many Jews? (She remembers she has heard the figure.) Five hundred thousand. Many more than to be expected in ratio to population. (That is a thought too complex for her to put over in Polish. She struggles and gives up.) General Malinovsky a Jew. Many high military decorations to Jews, many.

Comrade Woinarski belches remotely. She is aware she has not held his attention. Probably the stench of the heaped bodies is in his nostrils. She turns away from the blackboard and puts the chalk in the box again.



"Jews!" grunts Bronek.

So he is back again where he was before, there in the deep darkness, long after midnight.

"Jews!"

"Tut! Tut!" goes Schoolmarm Raven. She has other things to think about just now than enlightening poor Comrade Woinarski's priest-ridden ignorance.

Then an idea occurs to her which is as sudden and fresh as a spurt of water. It isn't a new idea, quite. In a sense it's as old as herself, and a lot older than that, a few thousand years older than that. But it's never occurred to her before, in all her twenty-one years—or twenty-two, is it?

It's not quite an idea, it's a realization. Her mother was a Jew. Her father was a Jew. Not in the suspect Zionist sense, the sense in which so many misguided Jews from the western countries have become agents of Big Business and the British Empire. But they were Jews right enough. They sometimes talked Yiddish together. She could talk a fair amount of Yiddish herself. She was a Jew herself. Very odd.

"Comrade!" she calls out.

He lifts his head and listens, to see if there is a sound in the night beyond his wife snoring in the next room, and the boughs creaking. He cannot hear anything.

"No, Raven," he tells her. "I can't hear anything."

"I would have you know, comrade," she tells him, "I am a Jew."

Silence follows, except for the woman snoring in the next room, and the trees, and a dog barking far off.

"What?" he asks again at last. He has probably not heard aright. "Eh?"

"I am a Jew," she repeats. "I never thought of it."

His finger scratching away at the old scalp makes a sizeable noise. An idea has occurred to him, too. Jews are strange people. He's seen them going into the synagogue and coming out again, with earlocks and flowing beards and deep eyes red-rimmed from the study of their magic books. Magic goes on inside those places, it is sometimes said. They keep captured spirits in a great cupboard, with velvet hangings sewn on with magic writings. Did he not see it with his own eyes, that time they were saying they had the Host in the synagogue in Kamiencyk, and were mocking it with incantations, and the boys got together with torches and firebrands?

One of those spirits has come out of a box that was smashed up in one of the burned synagogues. It is out for trouble. Now it is playing tricks with this poor girl from over there, beyond the rivers. He shudders and makes the sign of the cross.

"Tee-hee!" the old man titters nervously. "Tee-hee!" He had rather not pursue the subject. There is silence again, except for the snoring, and a



louder creaking in the branches of the walnut-tree. The wind is freshening. There will be rain. Beyond that there is silence. One minute. Two minutes. Five minutes.

Then the girl calls sharply :

"Listen. Do you hear?"

He hears nothing.

"Oh yes!" she seems quite sure this time.

"You're hearing devils!" he grumbles. "In the name of God!" It's four times, five times, she has called to him since midnight, and each time it has been merely a machine going on, or a lorry far off on the road. Twice she has been out in the fields already, and back again. It is not good to be out in the fields at night. You never know when one of their patrols is about. They don't like folk to be prowling round in the darkness, even near their own homes. They ask no questions. They shoot.

He pricks up his ears. She's right. A machine is coming in this way from the east. Or from the south, is it? It's not easy to say which way a machine's flying, the wind plays odd tricks. It's overhead. It's going on. It's coming back again, straight for us. It's a lot lower now, it's making a sweep, round, then round again.

"It's them!" he exclaims, and rises to his feet. But she's already out there. It's almost uncanny, the way she can move, without doors or boards creaking, or the least sound of a footfall. She's more like a ghost than a human being.

He's out by the barn now, on the edge of the wheat-patch.

It's them right enough. How can they tell up there, that this is the place they're looking for? It's so dark, but not so dark from up there, maybe. The shape of the woods, the village, the lakes, the stream at such an angle to the road . . . That must be the way of it.

And they've probably had a signal from her torch, too. Where is she?

"Where are you?"

She doesn't answer. If she did, he couldn't hear, the machine is so low, the engines are making such a roar. Mother of God, how is it possible for the whole region not to hear? They must have dropped the thing by now. The hen's laid the egg. Is that it? No, nothing. Yes, that's something, swishing and straining. Involuntarily he lowers his head and covers his untidy grey thatch with his hands. That would be a fine one, that would, a canister on the brain-box, as big as a drain-pipe.

No. That's not it. It's only the wind, and the boughs scraping. The machine's going off at last. Not yet. Here it is again. They can't have failed to hear it. Well, that's the risk you've got to take. What's to prevent an engine failing, so a machine has to come low to try and land; then the engine goes right again, and the machine goes on?



Where is the girl? Has she found the canister?

That's not the sound of an aeroplane, Bronek. That's something else. A noise hugging the ground, a sharp quick thump, a different noise altogether. Do you know what that is? It's a motor bicycle. It's one of them, one of the patrols, the black-suited ones. That's bad luck, isn't it, a patrol being so close at hand? Yes, there's the lamp, there where the track twists out of the wood, a light pushing jerkily forward into the darkness like a bright white broom-handle.

"Raven!" he whispers. There's no need to whisper. The motor bicycle is a mile away yet. "Raven!" he calls louder. Whatever's to happen will happen, but if Raven has found the canister, she might need his help to cover it up somehow. It depends where it's fallen. In the darkness it might easily look like a sack of roots if it got a bit of muck spread over it. But if it's close it would be better to unhook the parachute and cart it off to the pig-stye. There might just be time. He peers round with his sharp peasant eyes, thrusting on from tussock to tussock.

"Raven!" he calls for the last time.

She's right. She won't answer now. Two together are fools, one alone's a wise man. He thrusts around for half a minute more, then gives up. He turns to the house, and trudges forward. He might make it, but it's not likely. He mustn't run. He must take it calmly. If a man's calf gets out at night, isn't it his business to go and look for it?

It's only the parachute that's the danger. If the man happens to shine the beam of his lamp on it . . .

The machine's only a couple of hundred yards away now. Bronek moves forward without haste, as a man does going to the stye with pig-swill. But his lips are mumbling a word or two. Mary Mother, Mary Mother.

The machine has stopped, close by the house. The man kicks the step down, and balances the machine. Then he makes an adjustment to his lamp, seizes the handle-bars, and twists them in a long arc to the right and the fields beyond, to the left and the fields this side.

The beam halts, as if it had struck against a wall. Bronek stands drenched in the light, like a stone in a fountain. The whole world is a clock that has stopped ticking, between this tick and the next.

"Halt! Don't move!" The voice is like a whiplash. "Hands up!" Bronek lifts his hands. They confront each other, the German conqueror, the Polish conquered. "Who are you?"

"It's me! Bronislas Woinarski! I live here!" He is not afraid, any more than a tree in a wind is afraid. He, too, has his roots.

"Come forward!"

He comes forward heavily over the sticky furrows.

"Stop!"



He stops. There are some twenty yards between them. The German is invisible behind the blinding cone of light, but Bronek knows his hand is on the holster, the gun is out and covering him.

"What are you doing out there?" He might as well find out what there is to find out before he shoots.

There is no answer for some seconds, for Bronek's tongue never works quickly.

"There's a hole in the barn," he brings out. Then he stops. He has seen something, whatever it might be, a moth, a leaf fluttering. He has heard something, perhaps one grass-stalk rubbing against another. Then he brings out the words again, more loudly and rapidly than is his custom. "I tell you, this is my place. That is my barn, there is a hole in it. I hear the old cow mooing. That calf has got out again. . . ."

He does not continue with his explanation, and does not need to. There is a deep gasp, no more, from the throat of the man on the machine. The cone of light shivers and twists on one side and spills over on to the mud-track. The machine sputters and collapses.

The Pole covers the ground between himself and the leaping machine, the dying German, the efficient young woman from beyond the frontier. The blood is gurgling in the German's throat like washing-up water trying to get away from a sink.

"In God's name!" the Pole says, and heaves the machine aside and kicks the man's face where it has fallen among the roots, and spits. "Good girl, Raven!"

She has lifted the machine by now and switched off the engine. It seems a matter of routine to her, as if she has done this sort of thing often enough before. The machine is standing on its step again.

"Give me a hand with him, comrade!" she orders. "Let's move at once!"

"Good girl, Raven!" breathes the old man again. It has been a fine piece of work. He would like to utter some more words of praise, but those are about all he has. "I'll have him, Raven!" He swings the body on to his shoulders, like a sack. "The mud's deep beyond there, enough for both, I think."

#### CHAPTER FOUR

THERE was little conversation between the Frau General and Oberscharführer Mack on the flight to Vienna. Mack was sulky, Elsie quite soon became preoccupied with the state of her inside, and remained so. In Vienna Mack got furiously busy fixing up the connection with Jena, the air-junction



for Warsaw, and trying to get in touch with the nursing home where Brockenburg had been taken. Beyond Vienna and Jena, Elsie's inside became more lugubrious. The flight to Warsaw, in the aeroplane marked BX 123572, was by way of being a nightmare.

A number of years ago the machine had been a German Lufthansa 'plane. Then a trade agreement with Yugoslavia was signed by the Reich, providing for the delivery of a quantity of industrial goods in exchange for Yugoslav pigs and grain. The industrial goods were not forthcoming. On urgent remonstrances by the Yugoslav Minister in Berlin there arrived in Belgrade a large consignment of German aspirin, enough to deal with every headache in Yugoslavia for the next hundred and fifty years. As a result of still more urgent remonstrances by the same Yugoslav Minister, backed up by the stopping of four thousand pigs at the frontier, there arrived in Yugoslavia some consignments of more substantial wares: a number of guns just old enough to be of no use for defence against a modern enemy, and a few aeroplanes, among them the BX 123572, by then obsolete and withdrawn from service on German routes, but good enough, it was felt, for the Balkans. Little did the consignors know—or did they?—that the same machine would be overtaken by the Germans' *Drang nach Osten* a few years later, and an item among the booty seized by the army in the hangars near Belgrade, and be thus redeemed for the German Reich.

Anyhow, there it was, with Yugoslav inscriptions still in the passengers' cabin, but with German markings once more on the exterior; there it was, ramshackle but alive, just about fit for service on that secondary line of communication, Jena to Warsaw, run irregularly and precariously for the benefit of high officers returning from leave and officials of the civilian administration of Occupied Poland. It had not been easy for Herr Oberscharführer Mack to arrange accommodation even for the Frau General von Brockenburg, let alone for himself, but he had brought it off. The flight had not been a pleasant experience. Not a word had been exchanged between them, partly because of the continuous roar and rattle in the passengers' cabin, which was built before sound-proofing was applied to aeroplane construction, partly because by this time Elsie was glassy-eyed. Herr Mack was not feeling too well, either. They were not popular with each other.

In due course the seedy bird alighted on the supplementary civilian airport now in use two or three miles to the north-west of Warsaw. The usual formalities were conducted. The officials were at first not sure the lady was the august lady she seemed to be. Mack left them in no doubt. They put their rubber stamps on, and went off, marvelling. No special instructions had been issued to them.

"Damn!" said Mack again when they were well out of earshot, and still again, "Damn!" He stamped his foot furiously.



"Isn't there any car? Isn't anybody here?" asked Elsie weakly, taking a deep breath of comparatively stable air. She hadn't been sick in the 'plane, she was not going to be sick on terra firma; it would be too humiliating.

"I sent a wire to his adjutant! I told you!" Mack announced angrily. He had not told her. She had been in no state to be told anything. "He's not even sent a deputy. What happened to my wire, eh?" He looked at Elsie as if he felt she might have had it sidetracked. He was obviously extremely uneasy. "Your bag, Frau General! We'll see if anything's doing outside!"

They had not moved more than a few yards towards the air-port entrance when a car flying the S.S. pennant swept in from behind the office buildings, made straight for them, and stopped.

"Frau General von Brockenburg?" asked a voice. "Herr Oberscharführer Mack? Heil Hitler!" The man at the wheel descended, or rather waddled, from the car and brought up a podgy pink little hand in a vague salute to the ear. He was small and fat and rosy, with bright little eyes twinkling behind pince-nez above the cushions of the smooth cheeks. The hairs of the moustaches were almost translucent. He had two or three chins in the front and at the rear of the skull.

"Glaeser the name," he announced cheerfully. "I've been sent to receive you and bring you to town."

Mack sniffed portentously.

"About time, too. Keeping the Frau General waiting——"

"Yes, yes, indeed," the Frau General wanted to say. But she didn't. The earth was still tilting, like one of those great rotating discs at a fair. There was still a shade of green in the grey sky.

"Permit, Frau General," requested Herr Glaeser. He opened the door of the car. She ensconced herself in the back seat. Mack got in beside Glaeser. The car lurched forward. It was quite unpleasant, almost like the aeroplane. They cleared the air-port buildings and headed for the city.

"Why are you late?" Mack brought out suddenly. He was not one for being slighted. "When did you get my wire?"

"Wire?" asked Herr Glaeser. "I don't know of any wire. All wires go automatically through Gestapo headquarters."

"You didn't receive instructions from the Herr General's adjutant?"

"Oh no. Where from? Is the Herr General expected in Warsaw? Or is the Frau General en route to the Herr General's headquarters? Oh, I beg your pardon." He blushed rosily, and lifted his hand to his mouth as if he had hiccuped. "One shouldn't ask. But it is permitted, I hope, to congratulate the Frau General on the General's decoration announced this morning on the wireless. The General wouldn't remember me, but I remember him well enough. I served under him in Norway."

"Go and eat coke," Elsie burbled within herself dimly.



"Who sent you then?" Mack wanted to know.

"We have a staff at Gestapo H.Q. detailed for reception duty. People keep on coming and going, you know. I'm on today, and it'll be my job to see the Frau General is fixed up. A great honour." Herr Glaeser inclined the head. The chins shuddered. The pince-nez twinkled.

Altogether Herr Glaeser was a somewhat loquacious gentleman, and full of information, at all events on the subject of Warsaw. The journey was becoming quite a conducted tour. He waved a plump little hand through the window.

"Not a bad bit of bombing for those early days Herr Oberscharführer. Pretty neat, eh? I believe it was some sort of a Female Idiots' Orphanage. Holla!" There was a slight bump as the bonnet flung an old man aside, lifted him, and brought him down on his skull. That was the end of that old man, presumably. "These roads—not bad, eh? I believe they were pretty frightful when we first moved in."

The roads were not bad, but the surroundings generally were pretty dismal. Nothing much had been done since the early bombing, except to those establishments and communications which might be of use to the Wehrmacht. The suburbs of Warsaw could at no time have been an exhilarating place. The buildings were closer together here, and taller. They were on the fringe of the town proper.

They had passed through several control points, and now came to another. You might have thought the place was the Kingdom of Heaven from the way it was guarded. There was no hold-up anywhere. The pennant was familiar; so, doubtless, was the car. Then harsh and high a Wall thrust across the roadway. There was a gate in the Wall and a knot of people clustered there. The car turned sharp left from the road into a by-street. The neighbourhood was as dismal as any Elsie had seen in any city, including the Ancoats of her native Doomington . . . pitted lanes, scowling tenements, lop-eared wooden hovels hardly larger or cleaner than middens.

"The workers' district, Powanski," Herr Glaeser was apologizing. "And now—the cemeteries. I hope the Frau General will forgive. Of course at night it wouldn't be safe, with all these seditious Polish workers. The Ghetto's beyond there. It makes us feel good to know there's that nice big Wall . . ."

The Wall! The Ghetto Wall in Warsaw! Of course! She had read about it somewhere. Or had she heard about it on the wireless? Or had somebody mentioned it at a tea-party? Her head swam. But she knew about it right enough. There were fine goings-on behind that Wall, she recalled. But it was all like the substance of a conversation in a dream; or in another life, maybe, when she had been Cleopatra or Nebuchadnezzar or somebody.



"We could have gone straight through—there are thirteen gates, you know—but I thought the Frau General should be spared the smell. Oh, the *smell* of those Jews!" Now and again the voice ran up in a shrill little arpeggio.

"Is it possible?" Elsie mused. "Is he being deliberately insolent? Shall I stop the car and have somebody take him off and do things to him?" She decided against it. She felt much too odd inside.

Hello, the car's stopped. What's going on?

"Yes, certainly, Herr Oberscharführer," the little man was saying. "You'd like to telephone from here? Why not?"

Herr Glaeser had not only stopped the car, he was out of it. So was Herr Mack, on the opposite side, up against the pavement. With a speed which was quite extraordinary for so short and tubby a gentleman, Herr Glaeser had whipped round the car and was over at the shop with the telephone-sign over the door.

("Good old Mack," reflected Elsie. "He wants to get into touch with people before this little rat pushes his whiskers in. He's smart; not quite smart enough for Mr. Rat-Whiskers, I think.")

"Please allow me," Herr Glaeser was insisting cordially. "You've got to know how to handle the telephone in Warsaw. And I'm sure you haven't any small change, have you? Do you happen to know the number, or shall I——"

"Cut it out!" snapped Mack. "They won't be in yet! I'll telephone later." He strode back furiously into the car. Herr Glaeser joined him.

"So sorry," he murmured, getting into gear. "Well, later maybe, I'll be delighted."

Conversation from then on was not brisk. Mack was in a towering temper. Elsie was coming round a bit; but she kept her eyes closed. She wasn't interested in Warsaw. The sooner she was out of the place the better. Glaeser chirruped without conviction. Then he too relapsed into silence. They were swinging round towards the central sections of the city. You felt it might have been rather handsome in these parts once. There were fine stores, office buildings, baroque churches, which had survived the excitements. There were even large plate-glass windows in some of the shop-fronts. Perhaps those had been put in later. The conquerors liked things to look pleasant, in the parts of the city where they might pass to and fro with their women. There were handsome limousines sliding up and down, as if it was pre-war Unter den Linden. These were for the conquerors, of course. Those hand-pushed buggies—those were doubtless for the natives. Like rickshas. Awfully Eastern. Singapore . . .

Herr Glaeser was talking again.

"I'm sure they can make you quite comfortable," he said.



"Who do you mean?" snapped Mack.

"At the Europe Hotel."

"Why the Europe Hotel?"

"But naturally—the best hotel in town. I've booked rooms for you. You wouldn't get rooms anywhere else, anyway."

"I see," thought Mack. "And be comfortably watched in the bargain. I must hand it to them. They've got things sewn up pretty nicely." He was too good a German not to acknowledge the thoroughness of their preparations.

The journey had not lasted many more minutes when suddenly Mack gave tongue.

"Stop!" he exclaimed.

Little Glaeser was so startled, and braked so sharply, the car behind him had to do all it knew not to run into him.

"Telephone?" he asked. "Here? Where?" He looked round.

But Mack was already out of the car, and had opened the rear door.

"Your bag, Frau General," he demanded. "Here it is, the Hotel Kazik. I told you, I wired for rooms."

Elsie started.

"What? Where? Oh, of course!" It was an odd sensation, as if she was coming to a place where she knew she was expected. She pushed her bag forward, then gave Mack her hand. She looked out through the open door. Hotel Kazik. She had never heard of it in her life. A faded, second-class sort of place that might have been something once. What had she to do with the Hotel Kazik, Warsaw, or the Hotel Kazik, Warsaw, to do with her? Of course Mack hadn't wired for rooms, he had told her no such thing.

"Good for you, Mack," she thought, as she stepped out on Mack's arm. "That'll put the little man's nose out." She stood on the pavement and smiled remotely on the tubby little Gestapo receptionist, as he had called himself. He was quite oddly like a black-beetle.

"Thank you, to be sure, Herr Glaeser," she murmured.

"I'll see you sometime," said Mack, and turned on his heel under the hotel verandah.

Herr Glaeser drove off. There was really nothing else for him to do. As he approached the corner he brought the fleshy part of his palm down on the button and honked violently.

"Naughty! Naughty!" murmured Elsie, and climbed the steps that led into the hotel. A seedy old commissionaire opened the doors. She put her hand on Mack's arm.

"You just spotted the place as we drove by?" she asked him.

"*Eben*, Frau General! Quite so!"

She shivered slightly. But somebody *had* said something about the



place, and her being expected there. Somebody? Who? What nonsense! Mack was moving ahead of her through the vestibule to the reception-desk. Yes, it was a dim and sorry affair, with melancholy plants soaring on rubbery stems out of chipped blue-and-white tubs, and rather mangy easy chairs propped against pillars.

"We want two rooms!" stated Mack.

The clerk pushed his spectacles above the bony ridge between his eyebrows, thrust his head forward, like a hen in a yard, and made sure what sort of a uniform the Herr Client was wearing. Then he pulled his head back.

"Yes, *meine Herren and Damen*," he said hastily, as if there were a whole school of them. He moved a block of forms forward, and dipped a pen in the ink bottle.

"Please!"

Mack wrote first. Then:

"I'll just put a call through," he murmured, "before that fellow can stick his nose in." He put the pen down and moved off. The clerk moved the pad along and Elsie took the pen in hand. It was almost as if somebody had nudged her arm, the way it twitched. A blot popped on the paper. She wrote. The clerk lifted the block to his eyes to study the signatures. One did not fail, in that city at that time, to acquaint oneself with the identity of one's clients.

"Ah, Frau von Brockenburg!" he exclaimed. It did not seem that he was connecting the name with the illustrious statesman and soldier, or the voice would have been more breathless. "I have a letter for the *gnädige Frau*." That was the element in the situation that mattered to him.

For a moment her heart stopped beating. A letter? For her? Who in the world——?

But she *knew*. She had known the moment Mack had startled Glaeser into braking outside the hotel here. She had known earlier. She always knew when Oskar was about. She had even known before she had ever met him. It was, of course, supremely idiotic. Yet there he was, in the confined space between the clerk and the nest of pigeon-holes. Like the grin of the Cheshire cat, with the Cheshire cat himself not in evidence. There he was, the scar that went down from his nostrils to his chin, the fine blue eyes, the almost womanish mouth, the lover she had foreseen at various stages of her life, sometimes though many miles of space and long divisions of time lay between them. But now and here, he was not far off.

"Yes, of course!" she said casually, as if a letter, and a letter from that correspondent, was exactly the thing she had been expecting. The clerk went to the pigeon-holes, extracted a letter and handed it to her. She glanced at the envelope. Yes, it was his writing, though she had not seen it for some time now. "I'll go to my room," she said. "Please tell the Oberscharführer."



"At your service. There will be a room for the lady all to herself." The clerk said that as if he were, in fact, letting her have an eight-roomed suite. "Stasiek! Take the lady up to Forty-Three."

There was a lift, but it was not working. The carpet was worn to the webbing along the stairs and the passages. But she could not have said whether she reached her room in a lift or on her feet, or whether they walked over bare boards or thick pile. The man in the moth-eaten baize apron opened the door and put her bag down. Then he touched his forehead, and stood about a moment or two; then he shuffled off. He banged the door to behind him. He had not had much experience, apparently, in the way to treat fine ladies.

Elsie stood stock-still. For half a minute her mind was empty and her eyes saw nothing. Then she became aware as through a lifting mist of a bed beside her, a wash-stand beyond, a night-table behind. Then she became sensitive to the pressure of her finger and thumb on an object between them. The note, of course.

"What the hell is *he* doing here?" she cried aloud, suddenly and angrily. "How did he know I was making this way?" Then in a lower tone she reproved herself. "Don't be an idiot, Elsie! You're going gaga!" She tore open the envelope.

*My dear Elsie* [she read].

*A brief note to welcome you to Warsaw. I'm looking forward to seeing you as soon as I can make it. You are well, I hope.*

*Yours, as ever,*

*Oskar.*

The message was hand-written. Beneath the signature, as if there might have been some doubt about it, the full name was typed out: Oskar von Straupitz-Kalmin.

She shook her head, as if, perhaps, she had just got up, and she had better shake the sleep out of her eyes. Then she looked down at the letter again. Oskar. No doubt about it. She was awake. Oskar von Straupitz-Kalmin. She sat down on the bed and put the note down on the table. Then she got up again, and walked over to the basin. She turned the two taps on together, hot and cold. After some time, and a good deal of hissing and chuckling, a dribble of water dripped from the tap marked cold. The tap marked hot just turned; otherwise it was as dead as a glass eye.

"I thought so," said Elsie. "What did I tell you?" She went back to the bed, reached out her hand for the note, then withdrew it.

"Oskar. Yes, yes, you know it's Oskar. Well, why shouldn't Oskar be in Warsaw, like a good many thousand other Germans? It's one of the

biggest war-bases, isn't it? There are probably more German soldiers here than in Berlin."

But she knew that wasn't the strange thing. The strange thing was, of course, that he should know she, Elsie, was coming to Warsaw. The paralyzing thing was that he should know she was coming to the Hotel Kazik, when, fifteen minutes ago, she herself knew as much about the existence of the Hotel Kazik as she knew the street-names in Tuscaloosa, say, or Omsk. It was so fantastic that there obviously was some idiotically simple explanation. It was ludicrous of Oskar to build up a Great Big Mystery like this, like some cheapjack magician in a fair-ground. It was unpardonable. Her cheeks flushed with temper. There was always something of the cheapjack about him, despite his air of dignity and melancholy. That was part of his charm, of course. For whatever else he lost, even his self-respect, he never lost his charm.

She banged her fist down on the counterpane. "There I go again! His charm! His nose! His eyes! His mouth! Will I never learn sense?"

"No," she told herself sombrely. "I will never learn sense, never till my dying day. Here have I come to be by the bedside of my dying husband, and at the scratch of a nib I start slopping over——"

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" she cried faintly. It was only Mack.

"Yes?"

"No luck!"

"What do you mean, no luck?"

"I can't get through to the nursing home. They're not taking messages."

"Well?"

"At all events I've got the exact address." She raised her eyebrows. "Quite simple. I got it from Directory Information, of course."

"Of course," she echoed.

"The Comfort Nursing Home . . ." Then he bit his lip. There had been no point in giving the name of the place.

"I'm taking a taxi there at once, to find out . . . how the land lies."

"I'm coming too." She rose.

"No, Frau General, no. I will go myself first." There was no doubt he meant what he said.

"Very well."

He turned to the door.

"Oh, by the way, Mack."

He turned again.

"Yes?"

"Oh, nothing," she said. "Nothing." There was nothing to be gained by



dragging Mack into this business of Oskar and his letter. He had not noticed the sheet of paper beside her on the bed.

"I'll telephone you the moment I've got something to tell you. *Auf wiedersehen*," Mack said.

"See you later."

The door closed behind him.

"I wonder how soon he'll be here," she asked herself, "or perhaps he'll telephone. In Warsaw, of all places in the world! I'd like a drink. A glass of Moselle would work wonders."

She suddenly realized that that was the one thing in the world that could put her right. A glass of Moselle. For preference, a Berncasteler Doktor, nineteen hundred and twenty-three. She would die if nobody gave her a glass of Moselle. She moved over to the telephone on the bedside table and removed the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo, yes?"

"I want restaurant service."

"Pardon?" It transpired there was no restaurant, no service.

"Is there no goddamm porter, is there nobody who could do something?"

Somebody came to the 'phone. It might have been the hapless Stasiek. She explained what she wanted. A glass of Moselle. She gave the vintage, and the year. Another year would do, if there was no twenty-three. The person at the other end of the telephone was stupid, and extremely unhelpful.

"I'm Frau General von Brockenburg!" she bellowed down the telephone. "Go out into the town and get me what I want! Do you hear? If not——" She banged the telephone down in her fury. As she did so, the note-book attached to it fell off. She stooped to lift it. On the cardboard at the back of the block there was an inscription in pencil.

"Oskar again?" she asked herself. "Or am I going mad? Am I seeing things?" She read the message:

*Help! The Jews in the ghetto of Warsaw call out for help to all the world! They are out to murder us, to the last man! Help!*

It was not a message from Oskar. It was not a personal message to Elsie Silver. The words were smeared and faded, they had been written down, perhaps some weeks, perhaps some months, ago. She replaced the pad carefully in its empty frame, and took the few steps over to her suitcase. It was about time she got her things out, such as they were. She lifted the bag and took the few steps back to her bed. It was like a prison-cell, yes, exactly that, a few steps this way, a few steps that way. She looked round sharply.



They were ganging up on her, they had her hemmed in. The Jews. The Jews. The Jews. The Jews. The Jews.

She heard a bell clanging low and long. She knew it was no bell now ringing in Warsaw, but long, long ago in Doomington. It was the tramway-bell clanging as the trams moved up and down Blenheim Road, opposite the corners of Oleander Street and Magnolia Street. It had a more urgent note. It was a November day, with a good old Doomington fog about. She was in one of the side streets not far from home, and the fire-engines were clanging their way forward. Was the fire in Oleander Street? Maybe it was their own house burning? She quickened her steps, then slowed down again. If it wasn't their house, what had it to do with her? If it was, what use would a girl like her be anyway? She saw the old Jews shuffling along Magnolia Street, where the synagogue was, the "Lithuanian Brotherhood". It was the Feast of the Tabernacle, and they held in their hands the palm and the citron, well-guarded in its padded box. "Help!" they cried. "We call out for help to all the world! They are out to murder us to the last man! Help!"

She opened her suitcase, lifted it, and poured out its contents in a glittering heap on to the shoddy counterpane—the silk frocks and nighties, the long sheer stockings, the jewels that had come adrift out of the jewel-boxes. There was a box of chocolates, too. Lisa had not forgotten that.

"I hope to God," she said, "she's not forgotten my eau-de-Cologne, either." No, there it was, in its neat little travelling box. She took out her handkerchief and dabbed the scent on to her temples and the back of her ears. It usually pulled her together again, a dab of scent and a glass or two of Moselle.

There was a knock at the door.

Ah, there it was. They had managed to get her wine for her, after all. It's wonderful what a bit of throwing the weight about will do.

"Come in!" she said grandly. The door opened. She did not turn her head. There was silence for some seconds.

Then:

"Elsie!" a voice said. She knew the voice. She turned as if somebody had pulled on a chain that was fastened round her leg.

"Oskar!" she breathed.

It was her lover, Oskar von Straupitz-Kalmin, standing in the doorway there, with his arms folded, not unaware of the drama of this meeting in Warsaw, so quizzical a smile lay in his eyes and in the corner of his mouth not made immobile by his old scars. Twenty years had gone by since she had first set eyes on him in a Berlin night-club, her star-crossed lover, her lover destined to no luck. He looked hardly older now than then; for even then the gold was already faded out of his fine-spun hair. You could say,



doubtless, the silver sheen was more positive now. He was a civilian then, and still was. He had been a captain in the earlier war, but the new people did not seem to require him in this, at all events in a military capacity. His outfit was of excellent quality, but just a little flashy. It had not been like that in the old days. He had not been in the habit of making journeys to Savile Row for his clothes, as some Germans did, but his Berlin tailor had been almost as Poole as you make them. Oskar's garments recalled to her the London Corner Houses, perhaps, even, the Ritz Bar. The face was coarser than it had been, the skin somewhat pouchy and puffy, the mouth fuller; but the eyes were as fine and blue as before, there was perhaps a dewiness in them, which gave them almost a sweetness, which had once been lacking. The lips, despite their greater fullness, were still beautiful, beautiful to a point that made them almost womanish; and they were still proud. Proud of what? He had not disdained to live on Elsie's money in the days when she was the bountifully financed daughter of a millionaire. He had not disdained to receive presents from her when she had to live on her own stage earnings again. He was not so proud that he made any sort of scene when Brockenburg took over his place among Elsie's cocktail glasses and later in her bed. Proud? Was he proud, in some way outside all intelligence, of the stock that had sired him and he had done nothing to glorify? Proud that he had this Jew-girl's love, seeing in her a quality that neither she herself nor anyone in the world suspected? Proud that he would keep her love till world's end?

For one moment she stood by the bed, her hands straight down along her thighs, her head slightly lowered, as if acknowledging an emotion that was neither to be exulted in nor deplored. It was there as much as day and night are there, heat and cold. Then she raised her head and looked towards him.

"Well, Oskar," she said. "This is very odd, isn't it?"

"Are you going to kiss me?" he asked. He shut the door, then came over towards her, and lifted her mouth to his. It was like the embrace of a brother and sister.

"In Warsaw of all places," she went on. She was pale with the intensity of her self-restraint. It would have been so agreeable to throw herself on to his chest, and howl and blubber, and beat on his ribs with her fists. It had always been one of her lines. He would have responded with great adroitness. But now and again in a lifetime you have to keep to the job in hand.

He took hold of her wrists and looked affectionately into her eyes. "Nothing happens to you, darling," he said. "How lucky he's been!"

"In Warsaw of all places," he repeated her words. "But why not? You know that's how it happens. Sometimes it's Berlin, then it may be New York—everybody you know seems to turn up in the one place."

"Not everybody," she breathed.



He grimaced. "Well, in war-time the world's half its size for all of us." Then once again the strangeness of it swept over her like a wave of nausea. "How on earth did you know?" she brought out. "It's idiotic!"

"I've heard about your husband's accident," he said.

She raised her eyebrows.

"Does everybody know?"

"Oh no. It's not got around yet. But I happen to be fairly close to things." She raised her eyes. "We won't say any more about that, if you don't mind. I know he's being brought to some hospital or nursing home here. I suppose he's arrived already. And, knowing you, dear Elsie, I knew nothing in the world would stop you from coming to his bedside. I was right, you see. You have your good points, Elsie."

"I see. Very flattering. But that I should be coming to stay in this . . . dump . . . how on earth did you——"

He interrupted her.

"My dear, that was easy." He smiled. "The best place is hardly any better. There are only about seven places all told where you could possibly have stayed. You would have found an identical letter in any and all of them."

"Smart guy!" She was really very amused. He had always had a special brand of ingenuity. "And have you been going the round of all the seven hotels, waiting for the moment I turned up?"

"My dear!" he reproached her. "That part was much easier. I arranged with each of the seven porters to telephone me as soon as you arrived—if you arrived. The investment in tips was just bearable, seeing that it is still early in the month."

She did not insist that this time luck as well as ingenuity had been on his side. Supposing the Hotel Kazik had been not one of the seven hotels, but an eighth hotel, a ninth . . .

"Broke again, my dear? Or should I say still broke?" she asked lightly.

"Well, not exactly, my dear." He was turning a solitaire diamond ring on his finger. It was enormous, and it was vulgar. She was certain he would never have worn it in the old times. And surely it was not his own ring, it was someone else's.

"A matter of ready money?" she asked.

"You know how it is. They'd squeeze blood from a stone." Then he stopped. There was silence between them. Perhaps it was not wholly tactful to bring up the subject of women and their ways at this particular moment in their joint history. "You're all right, my dear?" He changed the subject. "Or should I say *still* all right?" He was looking on the objects thrown anyhow on the bed—the emerald necklace, the diamond watch clip, the rings.



"Naturally I've picked up a trifle here or there. That's the least you'd expect, isn't it? He's always been very generous. I got to like it. Tell me, Oskar . . . ." She paused.

"Yes?"

"I thought I might have heard from you now and again."

"They kept me busy. Besides, it wouldn't have been . . . very healthy . . . for either of us, would it?"

"What have you turned up for now? Is he really in a bad way? Have you come to give the prospective estate the once-over? Forgive me, Oskar. We were always frank with each other." She turned away from him. "And we were both younger once."

He came up to her and put his hands on her shoulders.

"No, Elsie," he said quietly. "I have a feeling there's trouble in store for you, and you may need help."

She turned and looked at him. It was quite extraordinary. You could say she was in a tight spot. The forces that had vowed themselves to Willy's destruction and her own were in motion, they were poised, not many feet away, ready to pounce. But she still felt, as between herself and Oskar, he was the weakling, he was the one that needed protection. As it always had been, as it always would be.

There was a faint flush in her cheeks as she turned.

"You are kind, Oskar. But I'm all right. In a day or two——"

The telephone rang. She lifted the receiver.

"Yes?"

"It's me. You know who?"

"Yes, of course."

"I can't say much. You understand——"

"Yes, yes. How is he?"

"He can't talk to you himself, he's all right so far. He wants you to leave at once and go—where I told you before. But this instant——"

"Listen. If you've seen him, then I can see him too. I haven't made this lousy journey just to have a cup of tea. I must——"

"God damn it!" the voice shot out. The man had lost all patience. "Woman, will you never learn sense? Clear out while there's time!" The receiver came down with a bang. Elsie turned away.

Oskar raised his eyebrows.

"Any trouble?" he asked.

"Oh no," she said. "A rather silly man, and a rude one. He'll have to be dealt with. Do you mind if I get on with this unpacking?" She was shaking all over with temper. She had to do something mechanical to soothe her nerves.

"I have an idea what he said," Oskar brought out quietly. "I heard quite a good deal. Don't you think . . . they're right?"

They were right, of course they were. How silly it was! If the man Mack had talked decently, like a gentleman, she might very well have been putting things back into the bag at this moment, not straightening them out on the bed. The only thing to do was to ignore Oskar's question. There was a pleasant little jewelled cigarette-case in the expensive litter. She took it up.

"I can't exactly say I brought it for you, Oskar. And it's a trifle feminine, maybe. But I'd like you to have it—as a keepsake." He had had keepsakes enough from her before.

"No, darling, no. You might need it. This stuff's your capital now. Besides, I'm all right these days. I'm fine." He looked at his watch. "I'll have to go off, Elsie. I only just managed to make it. I want you to have my address and my telephone number, you might need me." He took the telephone-pad and wrote. "This is my private address, on the Ujasdowska. But I'm not often in." He paused, a trifle awkwardly. "You're more likely to find me here, at my office. You won't want to visit me there, but you might as well have it. It's in the Ghetto, as a matter of fact, at the Food Control Office. Filthy place. Filthy job, too." He saw her shoulders stiffen. "Sorry, Elsie, but that's the truth of it. You may want to 'phone me up anyway. Here's the number." He wrote it down and handed it to her. "Filthy job and filthy place," he repeated. He stood there ruminating for some moments, then he looked up. The mouth and eyes had become extraordinarily wistful.

"Do you think, if your husband . . . isn't as ill as they say . . ." he hesitated.

"Yes, Oskar?" she asked softly. Just like a small boy, she told herself. She had never been able to resist him at moments like these.

"Do you think you could ask him to use his influence to find me . . . another job somewhere? Anywhere, away from this place . . ." His voice trailed away. Then he looked up suddenly. There was a ghost of a smile on her lips.

"I know! I know!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Discarded lover becomes suppliant at husband's knee. Forget it!"

"Oskar!" she cried out. "It wasn't that at all. I——"

There was a knock at the door. They looked at each other swiftly. She pulled herself together.

"Come in!" she called. "Oh, it's a bottle of wine I ordered. They said they couldn't get anything. What on earth is the stuff?" The lettering on the label was in Polish. She looked round helplessly.

"There's a corkscrew in my knife," he assured her. "And a tumbler over the sink. That's about all you're likely to get here."

"We'll make it a loving cup," she breathed. "Please!"



They drank to each other.

"To old times!" he said.

"To old times!" she repeated. "And to the times to come!" But there was little conviction of joy-to-be in her voice.

They drank.

"Again?" she asked.

"I daren't," he said, "I must go." The little interlude was over. "I'm hours overdue. They're not people you can play about with. Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye, darling."

He kissed her and turned to the door. Then he turned again, and reached into his pocket for his wallet.

"I don't suppose you have any of these?" He held out a wad of notes towards her. "Polish zloty issued by the General Government here. Have you?"

"I don't suppose so. There's not been much time. But really, Oskar——"

"You wouldn't be foolish." He was very firm. "If you try to use any other sort of money here, you'll be landing yourself in Queer Street. How you managed to get away with it at the air-port"—she raised her head—"I'm sorry. I'm forgetting who you are. No, Elsie darling, no. I'm not a money-changer. It has been the other way round often enough, hasn't it?" That was the soft voice and those were the smiling eyes that had always sent the tremors along her spine.

"Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye, darling."

They kissed again, and he went out.

She stood about brooding for a minute or two. Then she moved along to the telephone. "Find me a taxi at once!" she called. "What? A ricksha? No! A ricksha won't do! A taxi!" Then she lifted the telephone-book. It was in Polish, of course. She rang down again. "I want you to find out an address for me. It's in the telephone-book. The Comfort Nursing Home."

## CHAPTER FIVE

MARIA, Bronek's wife, was a good needlewoman, and it took no time for her to run up the two flat bags for the baratol, with the two connecting bands that were to support them front and rear down Tania's shoulders.

Tania slipped the bags on.

"Mary Mother!" exclaimed Maria, and raised her hands to heaven. The odd sort of petticoats that young women wore these days! It was clear the end of the world was coming. She slipped her fingers between the shoulders and the bands. "It will be heavy by nightfall," she said. She folded some cloth over and made two pads. "Here!" she insisted.

But Tania's mind had gone elsewhere. She was thinking of a young man they had called "Asher", who had been a guerilla fighter in a band with which she had worked for some months in the Upper Dnieper country. He had been a formidable creature, quick as a hawk with knife and trigger. Many a Fascist lay weltering in Russian mud that would not go back to spawn more of the foul brood in his own land, because Asher had sighted or smelled him and brought him down where he stood.

This Asher was a Jew. He wore the ear-locks of piety, he, a citizen of the enlightened Soviets, that had learned exactly how to appraise this "God" they grovelled to in capitalist countries, the fly-wheel of the profit-making machine. No one discouraged him, as it seemed. He worked by day, as all men must, and studied the Jew books all night long. It could not be said where he derived his strength from, his eye, his steel nerve. Doubtless, like the Christians and the Muslims and the others, he would say it was from that "God" of theirs.

He was one of the best of the fighters. He could go without food for long days and nights, but not without praying, three times a day if it were possible. He carried with him not only his knife and small arms but a holy outfit, that queer tangle of leather straps and small black bones—"tephillin", he called it, phylacteries. If it were possible he would fasten them each morning round his bare left arm and his forehead, even if that left no time for food and drink.

And slung over his shoulder he wore a set of sacred fringes front and rear; he called them *tsitsis*. As she now carried slung over her own shoulders her load of baratol.

She heard the word "heavy". That rather touched her amour-propre.

"I would not notice it if it were lead," she countered.

It was still early morning when she got into the train at Kamienzyk, and the journey to the Praga Station across the river from Warsaw, which normally took less than three hours, took the whole afternoon, while trains loaded with munitions for the Eastern Front shunted endlessly between the sidings. She was wearing the Sunday best clothes of the real Anna, the inner petticoats decorated with that unusually heavy embroidery. Her luggage was a bundle of food in a basket, some smoked cheese and a lump of bacon. In a pocket in her petticoats she carried an identity card, a *Kennkarte*, certifying she was Anna Pawlaczek, of Gorczyn, domestic servant to a Gestapo



official, Gustav Leist by name, whose private quarters were in the Belwederska, in Warsaw, an elegant thoroughfare. Clipped inside the card was a note in German, duly stamped, stating that this Anna had been granted a week's leave. The documents had been brought to Bronek's steading inside the rubber grip of the handle-bar of an S.S. officer's motor bicycle. But he was not an S.S. officer, of course, and he had not come to make inquiries, though he bawled loud enough to frighten the rooks out of the trees. She had one more piece of luggage: she carried in her head, along with certain other memoranda, the address of one Dymik, a Pole, in a worker's house on Nalewski Street, the part that lay outside the Ghetto Wall.

Her fellow-passengers on the journey to Praga caused her no anxiety; peasants and factory workers, for the most part. They were like shadows, afraid of using their voices lest they said something to compromise themselves or someone else; "the deaf-and-dumb men" the conquerors called them. At Praga there was a severe check-up of passengers, but they let her go off without trouble, after an examination of her papers and her basket. She walked away nonchalantly; or at least as nonchalantly as the load of baratol would let her. She had the air of someone who knew exactly where she was; in fact she had studied a street-map of Warsaw and its suburbs with great intentness at an early stage of her long journey. Through the corner of her eye she could see exactly where she was, for in Polish cities the houses have a tablet above their doors, giving the name of the street, its number, the number of the police area, the name of the owner of the house. It was very helpful. She went on foot, knowing that in an occupied city it is always asking for trouble to ride on public conveyances. Her way led her across the Kierbedz Bridge to the Zamkowy Square, and so through Mirdova Street and Długa Street to her destination on Nalewski.

Warsaw seemed to her a dismal city, quite apart from the acres of bomb ruin, the patches and scars and trenches, a city where the workers would need to have a good deal done for them when a Socialist government was established here, after the destruction of the Fascist invaders. It would all have to go: these narrow streets, these airless tenements, and above all that Wall, which she saw some distance away, closing in the perspective of one street after another. That was obviously the Wall the Germans had put up to shut in the hundreds of thousands of Jews who had been herded there from all over Poland, and Germany, and Europe generally. The Ghetto they called it. But it had become a vast cattle-pen where the hapless creatures were assembled in their myriads, then drained off to the death-camps, then again assembled, to be drained off again.

It was a grim-looking wall, topped with broken glass and a barbed-wire fencing. She gave it, or seemed to give it, no more than a casual glance, for



she was, for the time being, a peasant-servant girl to whom the sight had been long familiar. Her sharp eyes did not, however, fail to note a poster from some distance away :

Circus Busch,  
Berlin

she read. *Circus Busch*—the words re-echoed in her mind. She was not a fanciful young woman, but a nerve was touched. A wry smile tightened the corner of her mouth. Some distance along, the Wall, which seemed to run northward at this point, stopped. The narrow opening was evidently one of the Ghetto gates, of which there were thirteen, she had been given to understand. There was a posse of tough-looking Gestapo guards there, heavily armed. Among them there were some Poles . . . or Jews, rather. They were wearing a sort of Polish uniform, with a great yellow Star of David sewn on the right breast, and as a cap badge above the peak. She had heard tales of these Polish-Jewish police, caught in a steel-toothed trap from which there was no escaping. There were both Jews and non-Jews entering the Ghetto and emerging from it, the Jews wearing on the left arm a white armlet decorated with the Star of David. The Jews, leaving or entering, seemed to be in some sort of formation, as if they had come from, or were going to, some job outside the Wall where their special skill was needed. They wore a yellow patch on the centre of their backs for easier identification. The check-up was rigorous in the extreme.

Tania turned away. Number thirty-five, she wanted. She had it off pat. The figures ran northward upstream, westward away from the stream, on the left side the odd numbers, on the right the even. Number thirty-five ; there it was, the tenement house where the man Dymik lived.

Her shoulders sought to ease themselves under the strain of the bands from which the baratol bags hung. She wondered if Maria's pads were still there. I won't mind dumping these, she told herself. She was at the front door of thirty-five now. There were five staircases to climb up, through a succession of smells that grew more noisome as she rose. She found the door and knocked. There was no reply for a long time. She knocked again. She thought she heard a whispering, but was not sure. Then a minute later the door was pulled back a few inches. She made out the scraggy figure of a woman, so lean those few inches almost seemed to be a frame for her entire body.

"What do you want ?" the woman asked.

"Pan Dymik."

"Who are you ?"

"Anna Pawlaczek, of Gorczyn."

( Acc No 2046 )



"All right," the woman said, and closed the door.

Tania did nothing, said nothing. Several minutes passed. There was no point in knocking at the door again. They knew she was there. She moved the handle of her basket from one arm to the other, and eased the drag on her hips by shifting from foot to foot. She waited three more minutes, four. Then the door opened again. It was a man this time.

"Well?" he said curtly.

"There's a patch on my shoe."

He turned, giving a quick twist of the head. A moment later she was inside, the door was closed behind her. It was not a large room, and it was the only one. It contained the bed, a sink, a stove, kitchen things, and an assortment of holy lithographs and statuettes. The Dymiks seemed a pious pair. For a long time they took no notice of her. The woman picked up a shirt and went on with a patch she had been working on. The man was reading a tattered dog-eared booklet. It might have been a political manifesto; or perhaps it was the life of one of the Polish saints. There was a three-legged stool by the sink. After some minutes Tania sat down on it. She was tired, tough as she was. It is hard work carrying around twenty pounds of explosive. The pulse of life seemed to be running very slowly here. There was nothing she could do to quicken it. On a hook on the door was a peaked cap and the threadbare jacket of some sort of uniform, a tram-driver's, perhaps, or a postman's.

It was Dymik who broke the silence. Probably he had caught the direction of her eyes.

"I am a tram-driver," he said. "Route twenty-four."

She stared him straight in the eyes.

"Does that go through the Wall?" she asked.

"Why do you ask?"

"That's why I'm here."

He said nothing. He turned his attention to the dog-eared little volume again. The woman's needle flashed in and out along the lower edge of the shirt-collar. Some time later he raised his eyes.

"What do you carry in there?" He inclined a thumb towards her basket.

"Some food for one Leist, my employer."

"You have papers?"

She nodded.

"And——?"

She assented only with her eyelids.

After some time the man spoke again.

"They're having a bad time in there."

"So they tell me. It was the same over on the other side—for Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Poles, whoever they laid hands on."



"It's worse inside the Wall," the man said. He addressed himself to his book again. Then she was aware he was scrutinizing her.

"Well?" she asked him at length.

"You're young," he said. "You may go in. You may not come out again." She shrugged her shoulders. The remark did not call for any word or words. His mind went back a stage. "It's a slow dying inside there, and death is bad when it comes—worse than knives or bullets or any of the quick things."

"There is some soup in the pot," said the woman. She addressed her husband. "Shall she have some?" She seemed more uneasy about these goings-on than her husband, but it was not her idea to get in the way of anything.

"I have some food here." Tania pointed to the basket.

"They need it more in there," said Dymik, "if it gets there. A potato a day, and they think themselves lucky. Or if a dog brings in a bone, so that they can make themselves soup."

"Take," ordered the woman. She cleaned out a bowl with a corner of her apron. Tania took the bowl.

"They are only Jews," Dymik went on. "Lost souls." He signed himself with the cross. "But you would not treat dogs so. There are good ones among them. Yes, wife, true?" He wanted her approbation of that. The woman nodded, tightening her lips. She did not want to let any emotion take her in hand, or even touch her, if she could help it. "We had a son," he said, then he was silent for a long time. Tania found a bowl in her hand, and a spoon. The soup was thin and lukewarm. But it was good enough; she had not eaten for a good many hours. "He was ten years old." She got down to the soup, and finished it; she could have eaten a good deal more. Dymik seemed to have forgotten that son of his. He was down at his book again.

"You had a son," she said quietly, as if addressing an absent-minded professor at the Institute, who had dozed off in the middle of the lecture. She liked the amassing and arraying of facts. She would have been a tutor, in her turn, if the Fascists had left things as they were.

"Franci was ten years old," said Dymik, not raising his eyes. "He had got inside the Wall. You know how children are. They'll squirm in where they shouldn't be, if there's a whole army in between. He was playing with some other children." His voice was quite dry and even, as if he were reading from the book. "Someone threw a brick at an S.S. man that was passing by. He blew a whistle and two other S.S. men came. The children were still playing. They shot them, and waited till a rubbish-cart came up, then threw the bodies on it. Some distance away a bump in the road jolted the cart and our boy's body fell off. A Jew was near by, his name was Hershberg.



He waited till the cart went on, and went up to the body and found there was life in it. He took Franci to his own home, which was not far off, and there he and his wife tried for months to make the boy right again. He could not be moved, and if it had been possible, it would have been dangerous for them and us all. The boy died. They were good people, Jews though they were. They have been taken away long since, but each day I smuggle some food into the Ghetto, some little thing, whatever it might be—an onion, a garlic, a few ounces of bread. It is, you might say, a gift for that Hershberg."

"I, too, bring for them an onion and some garlic," said Tania sombrely; "not in this basket."

"There have been some from my people, and some from your people, who have gone in to join them of their own free will. Others are on their way. But there is not much time now," breathed Dymik. "For a long time they have been piling up arms in the secret places, and strengthening the cellars with timbers. It cannot be long delayed."

"I shall be with them," said Tania.

"And for a week or two, and longer than that, there have been posters coming out on the walls . . . posters of the Jews, printed God knows how, God knows where . . . posters of the Germans. 'Fight!' say the Jews. 'If we must die, then we die fighting!' 'Foolishness' say the Germans. 'Let everything be done in order. Let those who stay, stay peacefully. Let those who go, go peacefully. No harm is intended them. They will go with their whole families and all their property, to work in this place and that!'"

"I saw a place where they went," murmured Tania. "There was still flesh on the bones." She put her spoon down. Even that leather stomach of hers was queasy with the smell that had come into her nostrils.

"Talking, talking, talking!" The sound came harsh and high-pitched from beside the sink, where the woman was kneading some sort of greeny paste in a colander. "He knows what will happen to us."

Neither the girl nor the man made any comment. The woman's jaws were shut to again, as if nothing could prise them apart.

It was getting dark now, and Dymik rose to light the lamp. The shade consisted of a piece of brown paper with a hole in it to take the glass chimney. The light was as sombre as any darkness. Some time passed. No-one said a word. The woman was back at her mending again, the man leaned back in his chair, his eyes shut. He might have been asleep.

"Pan Dymik," the girl said at length. "When do I go in there? Is it easier by night? How soon?"

"The way you go it is the same thing by night or day. No-one will see you."

"What do we wait for?"



"They must be told you are coming within there, that one has arrived with a patch on her shoe. When I return I will see the janitor, who will have his rheumatism badly, and will go to his bed. He will have forgotten, I think, to lock the door of the cellars."

She eyed him sharply.

"A tunnel?"

"No and yes. There have been tunnels, and that has meant too much stuff to get rid of. The Gestapo are like cats waiting to pounce at mouse-holes."

"What do you mean: no and yes? The sewers, then?"

He looked at her with approbation. It took her no time to size up a situation.

"Yes," he nodded. "There is a small shaft from the cellar wall hidden behind the oven, behind old bedsteads and sackings and such things. The shaft leads to a trapdoor, lined on the outer side with bricks. When that is pulled aside, you descend into the sewer shaft, by which the drainage men climb down from the street man-holes. You descend some metres by steel rungs and you are in the main sewer . . ."

"Which leads under the Wall," she supplemented, "into the city where the Jews are. That's fine! You are good men, you Poles!"

"It is over there as it is here. When I have taken you to the end of the sewer, we will find ourselves at length in the cellar of a house where they will take you to your place. It is not a pleasant journey."

"I have not been living in Grand Hotels," said Tania. She looked down at the embroidered peasant skirts she was wearing. "It's sad about these. The comrade valued them."

"There is a black dress here. You'll find it more practical. Wife, get it for her!" he ordered. "I, too, have overalls, below there, behind the trapdoor. I go now. I will return soon. Inside there, you must have other papers." He went off. The wife produced the garment from among the pots and pans. Tania unhooked her blouses and petticoats, and slipped into that soberer attire.

"Will he be long coming?"

She shrugged her shoulders. She dissociated herself from knowledge of these affairs.

An hour later he was back. He handed over the new papers.

"The Jew *Kennkarte*," he told her. It was a sheet of grey paper, folded over in three, with a yellow streak down the front page. She handed over the old one. Then she lifted her basket of food from the floor and set it on the table.

"They'll be glad of it beyond the Wall," he said. "It would be better slung around your shoulder. The footing is not easy below there." He



wrapped the stuff in a rag and passed a length of string through it. "You are ready now? Mary Mother be with you!"

"Mary Mother be with her!" mumbled the woman, her face turned stiffly away, as if nothing were going on in that room.

"Good-bye!" said Tania, and opened the door, and made for the pitch-dark landing.

## CHAPTER SIX

### I

It took the taxi a long time to get to the Comfort Nursing Home. It was away in the northern reaches somewhere, for the sun was on her left hand as the taxi chugged onward. High up ahead loomed the large outline of some citadel, or fortress. It was quite dark by the time they got there. The place stood in a big garden surrounded by tall and sombre trees. It was a bit dingy, but private enough, and expensive-looking, probably more private than comfortable. It looked like the sort of place where, in gayer times, the doctors of Warsaw treated their women patients who had not known how to combine caution with gaiety.

"Where are we?" she asked the taxi-driver.

"Zoliborz," he growled. He was one of the few taxi-drivers in Warsaw. He could afford to be rude.

"You'd better wait," she told him, with an arrestive gesture. He put out his hand for money; he may have thought the people inside might get to work on her then and there. She handed him a note and went up to the garden gate. He drove off at once. "Ah, well!" she muttered and shrugged her shoulders.

"What do you want?"

The S.S. man appeared so suddenly it was almost like the gate itself talking, as it ground back on its hinges.

"This is the Comfort Nursing Home, isn't it?" she demanded haughtily.

"No!" The voice was remote, unimpressed. "What do you want?"

"But, my dear man, don't be idiotic! I've come to see General von Brockenburg!" She tried to push her way past him; but he was a burly fellow.

"There's no General von Brockenburg here!" he brought out woodenly. She threw back her head furiously.

"How dare you talk so stupidly? Get out of the way at once, or——"

At that moment a voice broke in on the altercation.

"All right, Welsch! Beat it!" In that same moment the man was not there, he was back at his post behind the privet hedge. She went through the gate, and into the garden path. "It's you again! Didn't I tell you to get out? How did you find your way here?"

"Don't be stupid, Mack"—for it was Mack, of course, curt, pale, extremely rude. "I've got a tongue in my head, too. If you don't let me through to my husband at once, I warn you, I'll have you put in your place!"

"Madam, you're a fool!"

Her breath came short. It was really as if someone had thrown a bucket of cold water in her face.

"How dare you?" she gasped. She felt an itching at her finger-nails, she wanted to bite and scream. She was, in fact, screaming. She was conscious of a third man advancing down the path. This was becoming a stage farce, with all these exits and entrances.

"Let her in!" the newcomer said. "Don't make a row out here! I can swear that fellow's there again!" Mack turned his head sharply. "No, round the other corner."

"But, Metzler——" Elsie started. She knew him quite well, it was her husband's first adjutant, he'd been to parties with them. Metzler turned on his heel and made back towards the house. The man came up from beside the gate and helped Mack to hustle her in. She bit her lip until the teeth almost met.

They stood away from her indoors. She looked around. The place had the atmosphere less of a nursing home than a fortress. Here in the vestibule there were four or five S.S. men, bristling with revolvers. A machine-gun commanded the window. More S.S. men were around the place, their jaws grim, their eyes watchful.

"In here!" said Metzler. He still refused to acknowledge her. She followed into a room which had doubtless been the reception office of the nursing home; it had now been improvised into a military dormitory.

"I will ignore your manners, Metzler," she said. "Where is my husband? I order you to take me to him at once." She observed that a door in the opposite wall led into a further room. She observed also that Metzler and another man were stationed so as to deny her access to it. On the left-hand side of the door hung some sort of chart of staff duties. On the right was a mirror, with a brush and steel comb on a ledge below it.

"The Herr General is quite well, Frau General." Metzler clicked his heels. He was at last addressing her directly. "It was not desired you should make an appearance here."

"Then where is he? Take me to him!"

"He flew to his Headquarters an hour ago. He left the strictest orders for you to leave Warsaw at once and——"



"He's *left*?" she cried. "You mean to tell me——" But even as she spoke she knew he was lying. Of course he was lying. The clumsy idiot! Willi lay dying, or dead, behind that door. Well, she was not quite so idiotic as they were. "He's *left*?" she repeated. "But it's impossible! He couldn't treat me like this!" Metzler shrugged his shoulders. "But why on earth did he let me go to all this trouble—*why*?" she protested, a break in her voice. "It's infamous! It's not true!" she insisted. "He wouldn't have treated me like this! He's somewhere in this building! He's dying, and you won't let me go in to see him!" By the movement of her eyes, the inflection of her shoulders, she conveyed the sense that if he was, in fact, somewhere in this building, it was very definitely somewhere else than that room there, between the staff-chart and the mirror. She turned fiercely on Metzler. "Why on earth would he go off like this and leave me hanging around in this hole? It doesn't make sense!" She waited.

"It's not my department to discuss military affairs with the Frau General," declared Metzler portentously. "But it's exactly because the enemy, too, is not expecting so early a return——" Then he clamped his lips tight. "That's all I can say, Frau General. I can only ask you to obey his orders."

"The *enemy*!" stormed Elsie. "The *enemy*! But I'm his *wife*!" There were tears in her eyes. "I've never heard of such behaviour! It's outrageous! And what's more, I'm not going to tolerate it!" She stamped her foot furiously. Then she started shaking her handbag, as if it was with that her next concern lay, rather than with defaulting husbands, or evacuating aeroplanes. "I'll go to Switzerland! Tell him that, will you? I'll give myself a damn' fine time there! And if he wants me back again he'll have to come and fetch me! Tell him that, too!" She had her handbag open now, and was fumbling about for lip-stick and things. Then she strode up towards the mirror, where the S.S. man was. "Get out of my way!" She thrust at him viciously.

But she did not station herself before the mirror. Instead she seized the door-handle and turned it. The door was open. In the same second she was across the threshold. It was as she thought: Brockenburg was in there, the body of Brockenburg, lying on a narrow hospital bed. They had put him into his uniform, with his decorations upon his breast and round his neck. His arms were folded. His face was pale yellow, like the pillow on which it rested.

"God damn her!" cried Metzler, ran after her, and stopped. The others were inside, hands on their pistols. One had his fingers about her arm. They all looked foolish. It was a detestable business, to have a howling hysterical female on your hands. It is always a nice short cut to pull the trigger and shoot. Yet there seemed a certain awkwardness, even in the uncomplex minds of a gang of S.S. thugs, in the idea of shooting the wife of a



General a couple of feet from his corpse, and that General, Brockenburg himself.

The woman turned her head towards Metzler with immense dignity. "Tell this creature to take his hand off me!" she ordered. "And leave me alone for some minutes!" There was no hysteria in that tone and that demeanour. The atmosphere eased.

"*'Raus!'*" ordered Metzler. "Get out!" They got out and shut the door behind her. For a minute, two minutes, she did not move. At last she went up to him, and placed the tips of three fingers of her left hand upon his forehead.

"Good-bye, Willi," she murmured. "I wonder if anyone told you I was around. I'd like you to have known. I suppose there wasn't time." She walked away again, and stood leaning with her back against the wall, looking down on him for another couple of minutes. Then she took from her bag the make-up things she had been feeling for a short time earlier, and touched up her face. "A cigarette, too, I think," she breathed. She lit it, opened the door, and went out to the waiting men.

"Good God!" said the one with shoulders like a buffalo and the ape-skull. He was profoundly shocked. He looked rather a brute, but he was quite a romantic at heart. It is true there had been no keening and yowling on the other side of the door; there had not even been the bump of a body falling in a swoon. But that was the picture he had been presenting to himself—the Frau General stretched lifeless over the body, or on the floor.

"She's a tough baby!" was, vaguely, the thought of another. "She can take it!"

But they were all of them disgusted.

"The goddam Jewish bitch!" they felt. "A heart of stone!" They had an image in their mind's eye of the way a German woman would have acted in these highly dramatic circumstances. "Well, what the hell!" they said to themselves. "Jewish bitch!"

The voice of the Frau General broke in on their reflections.

"You'd better tell me exactly what happened, Metzler," she said. Her voice was cold and matter-of-fact.

"I remind you, Frau General, of the last orders of the Herr General." His voice was as cold as hers.

"I think you owe me an explanation."

"Very well, Frau General. You will have realized that the aeroplane accident was not merely an accident."

"Herr Himmler, of course," she suggested.

He made no direct reply.

"We brought him to Warsaw in a dying condition, and commandeered



this place rather than take him to a regular hospital, so as to keep the situation in hand."

"He has never forgiven him for the Emmanuel business." She seemed to be talking to herself. "Well, it was not to be expected."

Metzler turned on her suddenly.

"Nor has he forgiven you, Frau General," he said sharply. Then his voice recovered its even tenor. "But it was not only that, that was just a trifle. There was a larger issue, we don't need to go into it . . . we'll just say there were certain questions of grand strategy to be settled between certain parties within the Party." Then he addressed her directly again. There was a trace of feeling in his voice. "The Frau General will take it as a token of our comradeship and fidelity towards our deceased chief that we've told her all this."

"Excuse me," Elsie corrected him. "It was your duty, wasn't it? He gave you orders. After all, it's very much my concern."

"We've obeyed our orders." His jaw set. "The Herr General is dead. The matter is no longer our concern."

"Why did you conceal his death from me?"

"The Frau General cannot be so dull-witted. I've said all I have to say." He turned his back. There was an impatient clicking and shunting of iron-shod boots. "Quiet!" he barked. He turned to the widow of his leader again. He had been very devoted to Wilhelm von Brockenburg. "Aren't you aware of the position you'll be in the moment it's known your husband's dead? We've concealed his death because we knew he'd have wanted us to—to give you a chance to get out. We won't be able to keep it dark after midday tomorrow; or the day after, at latest. So far we've managed to ward everybody off, the spies and the journalists and the rest of them. . . We've said it was doctor's orders, and the orders of the Herr General. It's worked with the local rabble; it's held them at bay. No one would dare to act openly against an order from a living General von Brockenburg. But they smell a rat, over in Berlin. He himself is coming over." It was odd what a distaste he had for actually framing the man's name. Clearly he meant Himmler. "We gather he'll be in Warsaw at eleven tomorrow or the day after. He'll be bringing the great Professor Sauerbruch with him, to see what he can do for his old friend. He'd get here before noon."

"You see, Frau General. By noon the day after tomorrow the cat will be out of the bag. If the Herr General's widow has not cleared out by then, she'll be at their mercy."

There was silence for some moments.

"You'll forgive me," she said. "I'm rather tired." She sat down on one of the beds. "I'm to clear out, eh? All right. I'll clear out. How?"

"Frau General, that's your affair. By bluff, I suppose. I don't need to



remind the Frau General she's pretty good at that. Why not try the airport? Don't forget that to them you're still the Frau General, after all. You'll manage," he assured her. A harsher note entered his voice than had been there. "*Unkraut verdirbt nicht*, as the saying goes. Weed doesn't perish."

"You are courteous," she reproved him icily. "Perhaps you, Mack, will come along with me to settle things with the air-port officials?"

There was no hesitation in Mack's reply.

"No, Frau General. Loyalty's all right as far as it goes, but there are limits. There's a difference between an Aryan's correctness and wanton acts of romanticism, though it would be difficult for the Frau General to understand this, of course. We've reached the limit of what we've been prepared to do for you. You find your own way out."

She looked at him quizzically under her eyelashes.

"You think yourself clever, Mack, don't you? Your only idea was to be 'correct', eh, to be 'loyal'?" She put such contempt into the repetition of his words, the man visibly squirmed. "You're not fooling me! I'll stay here!" She patted the bed as if to see how comfortable it was. She looked quite kittenish.

"Now, look here, if you think——" Mack started blustering.

"Keep your mouth shut!" Metzler requested. "Don't you see you won't get rid of her this way?" The cards were on the table. "If you don't want to believe in our loyalty, madame, please yourself. It's not only for your sake we're keeping the General's death dark till tomorrow."

"Because, of course, the moment Himmler knows about it—having no Brockenburg to turn on, he'll turn on you?" She smiled. "What difference will twenty-four hours make?"

"That's no concern of yours," he said sullenly.

"Wheels within wheels, eh? It's all a bit tiring." She yawned. "And dead or alive, I'm a pain in the neck to you. What *gentlemen* you are!" She used the English word.

"You're quite right," he said with sudden fury. There was an answering growl from the throats of the henchmen. "I don't mind telling you there were some of us thought it would be a good idea to knock you on the head. I personally thought it would be better to hand you over . . . tomorrow, as a token of goodwill. But as you said, we're gentlemen." She was smoothing her fingers down along her gloves. "So you're going? Very well. Anything we can do for you? A car?"

"Too kind," she murmured. She flushed with annoyance.

"Money?"

Her temper boiled over. She jumped from the bed as if a wasp had stung her.



"I'll find my own way." She thrust through the ranged S.S. men, out from the dormitory into the vestibule and so out of the building. It was dark now, darker in the shadow of these yews and cypresses, or whatever the gloomy trees were that flanked the weedy garden. She strode down the path, then she drew up short at the gate, as if a wire had been stretched before her feet.

"Good-bye, Willi," she said aloud. She did not turn her head. She went out into the street, and crossed the road towards the next corner. "Now for a taxi," she told herself. She felt there was as much likelihood of a taxi in these forlorn parts as of a wild gazelle. "What bit me?" she asked herself. "They're not worse than the rest of the mob, and I've put up with them for years." She shrugged her shoulders. "I'm fed up with it all," she thought. "Or is it all fed up with me?" She turned the corner and ran full-tilt into a man coming up in the opposite direction.

"Pardon!" she murmured.

"My fault!" said the man. They side-stepped, as people do, to get out of each other's way. Then the man recognized her. She recognized him. It was the tubby little Gestapo man who had met her at the station, the man Glaeser.

"Would you believe it! The Frau General!" said Glaeser. Whatever light there was glimmered moonily on his pince-nez. "I hope the Herr General has taken a turn for the better. The Frau General doesn't recognize me?"

"I do," said Elsie coldly, and walked on.

"I was just about to pay my respects," he called after her. She disappeared into the gathering darkness.

## II

Perhaps once it may have been easy to find a taxi at night in the outer regions of Warsaw; it was not so that night of mid April, nineteen hundred and forty-three. Elsie walked, and she walked further. Her feet ached, her eyes and throat ached. You could almost feel the dust of the initial bombardments had not subsided yet. "Taxi! Taxi!" she called, like a ghost wailing. There were no taxis. Of course there were not. There were, at that time, only four taxis functioning in all Warsaw. She admitted to herself she would be pleased to take one of those man-pushed things, those rickshas, which seemed to have taken their place in these parts. There were no rickshas, it seemed, so far from the centre as Zoliborz. She called after private cars, of which one or two drove by, and, when she stationed herself in their track, they made straight for her and would not have hesitated to mow her down.



A quarter of an hour passed, half an hour. A tram clanged by her, but she was between two stations, and the distance between seemed enormous. Besides, she had no idea where a tram would take her—perhaps even more futilely far off. It was very dark. She made out once, then a long time later, an odd lop-sided tower. She realized she was walking in a circle. She was conscious of shadows closing in behind her. She turned, and no-one was there. That was not true. On turning again, she heard a footfall, or whispering voices. The Gestapo were trailing her. Or was it some vengeful underground Pole, emerged from his cellar at last, thirsting for German blood? It was eerie. Her feet ached dreadfully. It would have been so easy to accept from Metzler his offer of a car. "Taxi!" she called defiantly. To hell with that band of thugs! "Taxi!" But it was a pitiable whimper at most.

Then at one and the same moment she became aware of a small band of people standing by the edge of the pavement at a tram-stop and of the tram-car itself clanging up out of the darkness. The conductor braked. The group separated; most of it went to the rear of the tram. One or two people went forward. She went with these, climbed on to the platform, and turned inside. The tram was divided into two sections, a small one for Germans in front there, and a larger one for Poles, behind a chain.

She took her place among the Germans. She was Elsie von Brockenburg. Her heart fluttered like an unquiet bird. What would happen if the conductor knew that, in truth, she was not even so mean a thing as a Pole?

"Plac Wilsona," the conductor called out. The voice was dry and toneless like a corncrake. "Meckiewicza." "Bonifraterska." Then at length: "Dworzei Growni." "*Hauptbahnhof*," one German interpreted to another, and bustled out. That was where she, too, got out. She had taught herself that the Hotel Kazik was in Widok Street, and Widok Street was close to the main station.

As she got out, by extraordinary good fortune she managed to find one of those four taxis, the rarer than rubies. The fellow stopped to her frantic waving.

"Will you take me . . . at once, please . . . to the air-port?" The words tumbled out as if she was afraid the taxi might dissipate into air before they had been developed. The man paused, and scratched his head. The fear seized her he could understand no German.

"You understand German?" she asked fearfully.

"*Aber ja!*" the fellow promptly replied. "*Volksdeutscher!*" Doubtless he had been one of those who had discovered his national allegiance the day the Germans were installed, and so had managed to keep his licence. "Okecie? Much money?" he wanted to know. His nostrils had caught a good scent. Okecie was the name of the big air-port to the south.



"The little air-port," she said. "Yes, much money."

"Please inside," he requested her, and took her off.

It was late by now, and it was a long journey. The offices at the air-port were closed. There was no-one around except a suspicious operational staff, cleaning out hangars, rolling out drums of petrol. The offices, they grumbled, eyeing her sourly, would not be open till eight o'clock next morning. Was there a morning 'plane to the West? Maybe, yes. She had better come and find out in the morning. They were busy.

The taxi-man was prowling around expectantly.

"The Hotel Kazik!" she told him.

"Much money?" He wanted to be quite sure of that. She wanted to scream, but restrained herself.

"Of course!"

They drove off again through the interminable streets. They had not been gone more than six or seven minutes when an idea struck her.

"Stop!" she cried. He stopped. "Is this your car?" she asked urgently.

"No. I am an employé. It is of garage-man."

"You want money? If you drive me away, out of Warsaw, back towards Austria——" Her heart was thumping violently. "Do you understand?"

"Please?"

She repeated her questions. The man's head, his shoulders, were lumps of wood.

"*Verstehe nicht*," he brought out. "Don't understand."

"Listen. You understand perfectly well. I'm saying that if you drive me——" She heard her voice getting thin and shrill. "This won't do!" she told herself. After all, she was still in command of the situation, for quite a long time, hours and hours. "To your garage!" she ordered. He nodded, and drove on.

They arrived at length. The place was quite near the main railway-station. The owner was in his bed, in a flat above the garage. It took some time to waken him, but, once achieved, the job was worth while. The hair, the eyes, even the startlingly irrelevant patent-leather shoes, were as shiny as black mirrors . . . an oily gentleman, a Lett, it transpired, fluent, submissive. The gentleman rubbed his hands. *Gnädige Frau* missed the evening train? A pity! A pity! *Gnädige Frau* would like a car to pick it up at Posen . . . Poznan, as the Polish pigs used to call it before it was liberated by the Führer? But, of course. He would be delighted to be of service. Would *gnädige Frau* like the Opel, or perhaps the black Mercédès here? Start at once? But of course. Would *gnädige Frau* be good enough to let him have those little chits which were necessary to cover him? Extra petrol allowance and all that? Pardon? It is not necessary because *gnädige Frau* is . . .? Oh, the honour is indeed great! Most proud to be



of service to the Frau General, most proud! He would get to work on the car at once, himself. It had better be the Mercedes. There's just the matter of the little chit. The Police Travel Control Service is no distance away, just round the corner, with night service and all. Just a formality. Will the Frau General just drop round in the taxi and come right back with the chit, and he'd be filling up the tanks and all that? Pardon? The Frau General didn't want to claim extra privileges? He quite understood. It reflected the highest credit on the Frau General! Good night, Frau General, good night! Indeed an honour!

She walked across to the station, and drew blank again. Nothing was moving that night except military transports. The next passenger train left at eleven fifty-five in the morning. "When did you say?" she had to ask again. The dumpy roll of darkness that had slipped behind the girder—wasn't that the little Glaeser? Eleven fifty-five in the morning? Thank you. Keep yourself in hand, Elsie. You're seeing things. Better leave things now. Any further attempt to get away tonight is going to be useless, and will make you only conspicuous. Back to the hotel, Elsie. Have a bit of a rest. There's lots of time in the morning.

There was no doubt about it this time. That was Glaeser right enough, talking to the night-porter at the desk of the hotel.

"Ah, Frau General, you're up late tonight?" His face was wreathed with smiles. He waved to her as she walked across to the staircase, as if they had been boy and girl friends at school. She smiled back at him. It was really quite magnificent; the assault he was conducting against her nerves. She unlocked her door, but did not switch the light on. She had a sharp pain across the back of her eyes, and the darkness would be agreeable. Besides, she did not propose to undress. After all, they might come and fetch her, and she was still a vain woman; she hated the thought of being caught by them in bed, dishevelled, without make-up, no longer young. She would get up at about seven, and drive out to the air-port. There was lots of leeway.

She lay down, and pulled her coat over herself. It was none too warm. The minutes crept by, with infinite reluctance the minutes became an hour, two hours. They were iron links in a just not immobile chain; they were animals with infinite circumspection pulling themselves along on their bellies. She heard creaks in wainscoting, crackings in staircase boards; they were frightening, but not so frightening as the parentheses of black silence. There was a moment in which she felt a sharp point, like an actual dagger, penetrate her vitals. What's got hold of me? she asked herself. Am I cooking up an appendix? Not a baby, I think?



You born fool, she realized. You're hungry. God, how hungry you are! When did you last have a bite of food? She recalled the chocolates Lisa had packed among the emeralds. God bless Lisa! She kicked the coat off, fumbled round for the chocolates, and devoured them like a mastiff engulfing chunks of meat. Her inside whimpered contentedly. In no time she was asleep. In no time she was aware it was time to get up.

She rose, and pulled the blind. Time was getting on. It would take too long to have hot water brought up; she did the best she could with cold, and tidied her face hastily. She was putting her things together in her bag when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" she called. They were bringing in hot water without being told to. The door opened. It was the cherry-cheeked Glaeser, the dawn twinkling on his pince-nez, the irrepressible, the insupportable, Glaeser.

"Good morning, Frau General!" he exclaimed cheerfully. He did not apologize. He took no notice of the preparations for departure. He sat down on the bed and got straight down to it.

"How's the Herr General, Frau General?"

"Much better, thank you."

"I'm so glad."

"I'm sure you are," she told him. She put a silk underthing in shape for packing. "Excuse me." He edged away. "You'd better tell me why you're after me," she went on easily. "Aren't you a very silly little man?"

"Not really, you know." He leaned towards her confidentially. "You think it's all got something to do with . . . with my official job. But it hasn't, in a manner of speaking. It's private, if you get me. You wouldn't know, but I'm an old admirer of yours, back in Berlin. You were then a Jew."

"If I was, I am. But then again I'm not." She flashed her teeth at him. How jolly everything was!

"I know." He beamed. "EX4/3578." He had it beautifully pat.

"What's that?"

"Your Deed, Frau General."

"What Deed?"

"The reference number of your Aryanization Deed. I was interested in it, as a fan of yours."

"That was nice of you. But I'd like to know what you're getting at."

"It was a bit fishy, though," he went on reminiscently. "Your mother's affidavit was missing. It worries me. It's not quite as irrelevant as you think. If your Aryanization were a fake your marriage to Brockenburg would be void. See?" He placed his chubby finger-tips together.

"Just try that on the General," she counselled. "I'll tell him first thing when I see him today."

"Do, by all means. He might agree, you know." He did not notice—or perhaps he did—the flash of fury in her eyes. "But you're quite right, it *is* irrelevant—as long as he's alive. But he's in a bad way. Suppose he dies tomorrow."

"He won't," she said lightly.

"I hope not. Still there wouldn't be any need for you to worry. That's what I'm here for. Why are you trying to beat it?" He was talking very much man to man now.

"Don't be silly. You know as well as I do, I'm going back to my Salzburg villa."

"And then on to Switzerland. Now, now." He wagged his finger at her playfully. "I know all that the little birdies twitter on the wires. And then on to England. That's the idea, isn't it? And on the other hand, why not? No, please don't!" he advised her. "I know what's in your mind," he smiled. She had lost track, but she smiled knowingly, too. "You remember—DGX/12982?" he went on. "But, of course, you wouldn't remember it in that form. That's the reference number of a report re the breaking of a flower-vase on the skull of a Reichsrundfunk official." He roared with laughter.

She laughed, too. She looked round.

"You're safe," she said. "No flower-vase!"

"What a relief! Well, Frau General?" He looked at her admiringly. Again that nausea churned in the pit of her stomach. "You'd be terrific—in England!"

"I'll think it over," she said easily. "On the whole . . ." she hesitated . . . "I think . . . I could pull it off. I mean, of course, if my husband agrees. I'd want to ask him, of course."

The little man beamed all over.

"I'm so glad you agree in principle, Frau General. I'm sure the Herr General would have no objection. After all, we're all soldiers in war-time. I'm sure that if the Reichsführer of the S.S. . . . I'll make out a report and ask him to discuss it with the Herr General. Is that all right?"

"Today at eleven a.m.? That'll be fine."

"You know he's turning up this morning?" His chin wobbled a little.

"But yes. The General told me."

"The Herr General's really all right?" He was now completely taken in. "I'm terribly happy. It was touch and go, wasn't it? If the Frau General would care to deliver a word of congratulation——"

"I'll tell him how thoughtful you've been," she said. "I really ought to do one or two things, you know. It's been most agreeable."

He bounced up from the bed and clicked his heels.

"At your service, Frau General." He took her hand and brought his



mouth within an inch or two of it. "We'll be in touch soon. *Auf Wiedersehen.*"

She waved an adieu at him, heard the door close behind him, then collapsed on the bed.

"Phew!" She mopped her forehead. She wondered how he had failed to see the sweat gathering there. Her joints felt as if they were made of jelly. Then she forced herself to her feet again. She looked at her watch. There was no time to dither around. She could only make the train by the skin of her teeth, if at all. If she were not stopped on departure, they would stop her en route. She must try the air-port, at once. She wouldn't be able to take her suitcase past the porter. He had certainly been put wise. She took the things out of the case again, and hung the dresses carefully in the wardrobe. Just her money and her jewels—she could stuff them in her pockets and her handbag.

She strolled downstairs, and stopped at the clerk's desk.

"I'll be back," she said, "in thirty or forty minutes . . . in case the Herr General rings up. You understand? And by the way, see there's chicken en casserole for lunch, will you?" She turned.

"Your pardon, Frau General," the clerk stammered. "I very much doubt . . . perhaps if the Frau General would have a word herself . . ."

She turned her back brusquely.

"You can tell them—if they don't bring out a chicken for my lunch . . ." She did not put the rest of the threat into words.

"I assure you, madame," the man said wretchedly. "If there's one to be had, it'll be here!"

She strode off towards the door.

"I'm damn' sure it will!" she said to herself grimly. "And I won't be here to eat it! Damn and damn!"

She left the hotel, and turned the corner. She was sure they were on the look-out, she'd have to move sharply, that's all there was to it. Luck was with her. She saw someone paying off a taxi, quickened her steps, and slipped into it as it was driving off.

"To the station, quick!" she ordered, as if she was rushing for a train. There was a smile on her lips, and on the back of her neck a sense of the hot breath of pursuers. It was all very stimulating. The actress, or the actress *manquée*, in her was tingling. "No, to the little air-port!" she called out sharply, a few blocks further on. The man nearly overturned in the urgency of the turn he made.

If they were after her, had she shaken them off? They were hardly such amateurs. She sat there, thinking hard. She knew already all this galvanic action was fatuous. It was merely a steam-vent for her drumming nerves. She knew exactly what was going to happen at the air-port. By all means,



Frau General, you'll get priority, just leave your form counter-signed by the *Verkehrsamt*. Or, of course, just as good, a signature from your husband, the Herr General, would do.

She was seeing everything with extraordinary clearness, the purple weed in a bombed site, a cat in the gutter delicately trying to shake some sticky ordure from its paw, an old man with his back propped against a wall, quite likely dead. Above her head was the name of the street that ran west and east across the big northward avenue they were pursuing. *Leszno*, she read. It was a broad street, many blocks right and left. Far off, on her right hand, there it was again, the Wall, the Wall of the Ghetto. The sunlight splintered on its rim of broken glass.

"Stop!" she cried. "Just wait here!" She wanted to think. She was seeing too much in one glance.

A signature from your husband, the Herr General, would do. Didn't she know her Germans? How could she hope to get away from a place like this without a chit? There were cars leaving the place. Officers' cars. Ask for a lift. Ask who? Don't you know any officers?

A light went on in her mind. Not an officer. An ex-officer. Oskar! Her whole mind flooded with Oskar. Why on earth hadn't it occurred to her to get Oskar in on this before? She recalled his words as clearly as if he were uttering them now, beside her ear, in the hotel room. *You're more likely to find me here at my office. You won't want to visit me there, but you might as well have the address. It's in the Ghetto, as a matter of fact. Here's the number.*

She leaned forward towards the taxi-man.

"Take me where I can telephone," she said.

It took quite a long time to get through, for the message was coming from the world outside the Ghetto to the world within, over a distance enormous not in space, of course, but in time, the many centuries of reversed and flouted time. Doubtless, with the efficiency for which they were well-known, the authorities were ascertaining and registering the source from which the call issued.

"Who wishes to speak to Herr Straupitz-Kalmin?"

Elsie was ready for that. She was aware that there was no name in the world it was less wise to transmit along those wires than the name of Elsie von Brockenburg.

"Fräulein Kati Balhaus," she said. "He knows me better as Dickie."

"Very well, Fräulein."

Oskar came through. He could quite well have turned down the request of the lady with the, after all, fictitious name. But it was possible, he thought, she was some lady he had had an affair with some time,



and the name had failed to register. Or he may even have been on the qui vive for a message from Elsie.

"Oh, is that you, Fraülein Balhaus?" The voice was tentative.

"It's me, Dickie! How are you, Busi darling?" Busi was one of the pet-names she had had for him. He would recognize that, though, of course, he would recognize the voice, too.

"Oh, it's *you*, Dickie! How on earth did you get my number?" She could almost hear the wink on the other side of the telephone. "How lovely to hear your voice!"

"I met old Karl," she invented.

"Oh, Karl, of course! I'd heard you'd turned up. It's a good many weeks ago, isn't it? I didn't know where to get in touch with you. I thought you'd gone back."

"Without seeing you, darling?" she reproached him. "What an idea! Well, we're here! I *must* see you! Where shall we meet?"

"You know the Café beim Schauspielerin? On the Allee Ujasdowska? I don't care what anyone says, it's the one place where you can hear decent music in all Warsaw. The waitresses were all singers at the Opera in peacetime. Didn't you know? I *like* talking against a background of music. You go along there straight away, will you, Dickie? Unless you're terribly rushed, are you?"

"All the time in the world," she assured him.

"Good, darling. I've got a few things to do. I'll turn up in an hour, less if I can make it. Will that be all right? What fun it is to know you're here! Adieu, darling. Kiss, kiss!"

"Kiss, kiss!" She replaced the receiver.

She paid the taxi off at the café handsomely. It had really been very sensible of Oskar to insist on her taking that wad of the General Government's zloty. The café was a sumptuous affair, a building of the late eighteenth century; it had probably been a town-house of one of the grander Polish families. It seemed to have escaped damage in the bombing, except for a few pock-marks in the stone. The entrance-hall and the reception-rooms that flanked it had been fitted out with glass-topped tables, wicker chairs and the usual café furniture. The great Delft vases and the tubs of greenstuff were probably left over from the earlier regime. From somewhere beyond an anteroom on the right the strains of a café orchestra issued.

"That's the room to make for," Elsie told herself. "There'll be more people there, but they'll have more to occupy their minds."

She moved across the anteroom; then stopped. The music was familiar to her.

"What's that now?" she asked herself. "I know it! Oh, what *is* it



now?" Then it came back to her. Music by Spoliansky, Book by Schiffer. One of the glorious revues the Jew-boys had turned out during the twenties for the Kurfürstendamm theatre and the delectation of all Europe.

"Here in Warsaw! In *Warsaw*! Did those two boys become honorary Aryans too? Or only their songs? Or were they beaten to a frazzle in Dachau? Or are they in Rio running a joint?"

She had reached the door of the room; it must have been one of the main drawing-rooms in the old time . . . Oh no, the time was not so old as that . . . not more than three or four years old. A noble chandelier hung from the ceiling, there were large gold-framed mirrors, fine brocade curtains.

"Oh yes! Of course!" The words suddenly came to her lips, it was hard work not to start humming them . . .

*Nur ein Tropfen von L'Heure Bleu  
Vermischt mit Juchenduft.*

The haunting tango out of "*Es Liegt in der Luft*". The snaky metal-sheathed hips of Margo Lion. It had been a toss-up for the part between Margo Lion and Elsie Silver.

She saw an empty table and walked over to it. She had danced to that tune, in the arms of Oskar, on the Kaiserhof floor. They danced there now to other tunes.

Everybody was scrupulously well-dressed, men as well as women. There were no officers there; as far as she could see there were no Germans at all. You got the impression that whatever was left of the mondaine in Warsaw, whatever had not been killed and had not been able to get away, assembled here as in a sort of votive temple to the vanished elegancies. The waitresses were certainly not waitresses by profession. That lady serving at the corner table was quite evidently a big-time soprano, only waiting for Tristan to unlock the flood-gates of an Isolde aria. It was all very Polish, and, in a forlorn way, smart. You felt that even the Germans, thick-skinned as they normally are in such conjunctions, felt embarrassed about imposing themselves on this last sanctum of the Polish *high life*.

A waitress came over. She might well have made that movement in earlier days to manœuvre for Samson's locks.

"Coffee and cakes," Elsie ordered. That seemed fairly safe. The service was not expert, but good enough; the refreshments were not good. The coffee tasted like thin lentil-soup and the cakes like pressed sawdust. She had managed to have the best of everything on her table throughout the war-years; the wife of a Party leader could hardly expect less.

"There are things to be said even for the flat in the Stadtgarten," she told herself, "bombs or no bombs, As for the château . . ." She was suddenly



possessed by a violent nostalgia for Lisa's meringues and éclairs, her *Salsburger Nockerl*, her chocolate with whipped cream. She felt that if she took the woody chip of cake in her mouth she would be sick on the polished parquet floor. She removed it daintily behind the shelter of her handkerchief.

"God! I wish I was back again! What the hell did I ever leave for?" she asked herself savagely. "Please, Oskar," she whimpered within herself, "help me to get back again, good and quick."

They had stopped playing the Spoliansky tango. Elsie wondered whether the choice of music was just accidental, or was it possible it had a subtle political implication?

"*Bis! Bis!*" clapped the customers.

The players grinned, and started off again.

*"I cannot waltz  
My bath has faults."*

Yes, yes. An English poet in Berlin at the time had sent her an English version . . .

*I merely am  
A painted sham,  
A powdered mess  
Of loveliness,  
The increment  
Of cream and scent.*

"Elsie!" she remonstrated suddenly. "I do believe you're crying!" There certainly was a spot of wetness in her eye. She removed, as it were, a speck of dust. "Oskar dear, I do wish you'd come, you know . . . This coffee's foul!" The coffee-spoon, however, was up to standard. So was the fork and spoon they served for the cakes. It should have been a hacksaw, she thought unpleasantly.

There was a monogram on the silver, she observed, a florid affair, the initial, R. "R.? R.? Radziwill, maybe?"

Ah, there he was standing in the doorway, Oskar. Her heart jumped. He was still awfully beautiful. What a good idea it was for him to get away from this frightful and frightening place! They might even get away together. Where they got to didn't matter really. Stockholm, Zurich, Buenos Ayres . . . Willy had a neat little packet salted away in each of those places.

Oskar had a sheaf of newspapers under his arm, possibly the papers had just come in from the old home town.

He had not seen her yet. Oh yes, he had,

"Oh, that's it, is it?" He was looking in her direction, he was looking straight through her. "Very well!" Her heart lunged unhappily. "He doesn't dare recognize me. For both our sakes, I suppose." He had come forward into the room and was scrutinizing the tables, as if looking for someone. It was to be presumed that the party, or parties, had not turned up yet. He sat down at an empty table, half-turned away from her.

"But I don't understand!" she told herself. "He went round to half the hotels in Warsaw leaving notes for me! He told them all to telephone him the moment I turned up." Then, in a flash, she understood.

"Of course! Nitwit that I am! He's got wind that Willy's dead! Who's told him? I suppose the same little bird that told him Willy had been brought down in his 'plane. I suppose every one of them's got a private Gestapo stooge in his pocket. So he knows I'm not Frau General von Brockenburg any more! I'm just plain Yiddisher Elsie Silver! Oh, Oskar, Oskar!" her heart reproached him mournfully. "You too, Oskar?" She checked herself savagely.

"You damned fool! He's turned up, hasn't he? He knows we'll both be compromised if he lets on he knows me, even here, in this Polish holy-of-holies. He's going to get a message through to me somehow. The waitress? What? Is he going to try and pick me up through the waitress? Of course not. He's just ordering slops and sawdust like the rest of us. You see. He's looking round for the lavatory already. There it is! That's why he chose that table, of course. I'm pretty well on the direct line of approach. That's fine. How sensible of him to take some reading-matter along with him."

A yard or so from her table he tripped slightly. One or two of the newspapers under his arm slipped. As he bent to retrieve them, the hand rested on her table for the fraction of a second, leaving a small strip of tissue-paper there. It was expertly done; he had had a good deal of training. There had probably been more than one occasion in his career when he had used this technique to make an assignation with a lady under the very nose of her husband. He outlined a remote: "*Entschuldigen*," and went on.

The strip of paper was almost transparent. It was almost not there. She could make out only with difficulty the words pencilled in capitals:

**CAFÉ SPLENDIDE. MARSCHALLSTRASSE. FORTY MINUTES.**

After a minute or two, she idly tore up the note, made a small crumb of it and placed it in her handbag at the same time as she took out her cigarette-case. She spent a few minutes with a cigarette, paid her bill, and went.

The lad's become quite astute, she told herself. He could have suggested the Café Splendide on the telephone. But he didn't. You never know who's listening on telephones. What sort of place will this Café Splendide



be? It won't be smart, like this place I've just left. What then? It won't be a dump. We'd both be too conspicuous in a dump. And the Marschallstrasse's a good street. I've a pretty shrewd idea it'll be a sort of businessman's place, with alcoves and plush seating and rose-shaded table-lamps. The sort of place where they fix their deals, whether it's sacks of flour or women. That's probably where he contracted for that diamond ring he was wearing. I'll go straight to the ladies' place and do my mouth and eyebrows up a bit. Then they won't look twice at me.

She smirked with self-satisfaction when she got to the Café Splendide. It was exactly as she had pictured it.

"I told you so," she murmured, and went to do things to herself. Then she sought out a table in an alcove as dark as a Spanish chapel. "He'll find me," she told herself.

He was there some minutes before time. He slid into the place so quietly she hardly knew he was there.

"Trude darling!" he said, and took her in his arms exactly as if she were a tart.

"Bobby, my love," she breathed.

Those might as well be the names under which they conducted their little hole-and-corner intrigue, here in Warsaw.

They talked about the fur coat he was getting her, then he asked her if she had heard how her small boy was getting on in Dresden. Then they got down to business, with an occasional, slightly louder return into make-believe, for the benefit of anybody who might overhear, and be benefited by it.

"He's passed out," she told him. "I'm sunk."

"I know."

"I've got to get away. You've got to help me."

He had his arm round her waist. He drew it tighter. "You know I'll do what I can," it meant.

"I've tried both the air-port and the station. It's no good. Besides, my papers——"

"You'd better go along there." He nodded to the toilet. "Get rid of them. The sooner the better."

"But when I get into Germany——" she objected wretchedly.

"Put that idea out of your head."

"I have friends there."

He raised his eyebrows.

"Have you?"

"I've got jewels and money. I can hire a car. But they want a chit for the petrol. Can't you help me to get a chit . . . Bobby?"

"And then?"

"As I told you," she floundered. "Germany, Austria. Then, later on——"

"No!" he said with decision. "No! I've got it all worked out!"

"Yes?" She pulled at his sleeves.

"You can't get away. Not now. Not till *he's* gone." She knew very well who "he" was. "There's a hue-and-cry after you."

"That's fun," she whispered.

"I'm not out to frighten you. I only want you to see how it stands."

"I think I see," she said.

"You'll be able to get away later. I'll come with you if I can only work it. You've got to disappear."

She smiled wryly and slapped her firm hips.

"Not so easy."

"Oh yes, it is."

"Yes?"

"Into the Ghetto!"

"*What?*"

"There are lots of people there besides Jews."

"Yes, of course. I'm Brunnhilde."

He went on:

"There are Polish Christians, Communists, German Army deserters."

"Charming," she said.

"You must be serious," he told her gruffly.

"Or I'm a dead pigeon?"

"Exactly."

"My dear. You've thought this out very carefully."

"Very carefully."

"It's a bit frightening, isn't it? They're having a thin time in there."

"I suppose they are. But who isn't?"

She laid her hand on his sleeve.

"Oskar——" she began.

"Hush!" He put his finger on his lips.

"Sorry, darling! It slipped out. I wanted to say something."

"Yes?"

"There was a telephone-block in my room at the hotel. There was a message written on it, it went something like this: '*Help! The Jews inside the Warsaw Ghetto are being murdered to the last man. They cry for help to all the world!*' It was pretty frightening. Is it really so awful?"

"There've been some bad times, of course there have. But it's been quiet lately."

"I see." She thought for a time. "Jews do tend to raise their voices when things go a bit haywire."



"Quite so," he agreed.

"Still, I don't like it."

"It won't be for long, darling." His voice was tender. "It mustn't be for long. A few days, perhaps a week or so. There's trouble brewing there. It may break out any day."

"Is there no other way, darling?"

"Every exit from Warsaw is being watched. There's no other way."

She bowed her head. Then she lifted it again. She was smiling.

"You know the song, my dear?"

*'California, here I come  
Right back where I started from . . .'*

"Hush, darling," he reproved her, and looked round nervously. The words were English, and the tune unfamiliar in those regions.

"Sorry, darling. You'll keep an eye on me?"

"That's what it's all about. I told you, I've got it worked out."

She looked at him curiously.

"You've done this sort of thing before?"

"We're all doing this sort of thing, all the time."

She seemed a bit puzzled.

"As far as I'm concerned," he explained, "it's usually the other way. I'm usually helping to get things out, rather than in. Little presents . . . and so on."

"Ah, I see." She lightly placed a finger-tip on the diamond in his ring.

"Quite so." He shrugged his shoulders. "Or it would have been quite intolerable. You see? We all have our contacts."

He looked at his watch as if to make sure that his calculations about the times involved had not been put out.

"At four o'clock precisely you must be at the corner of Lucka and Wronia Streets, the west side, the side furthest from the river. There used to be a butcher's shop there, you can still see the slabs. Have you got it?"

"Say those streets again. Which way is it?"

He told her.

"You'll see a small boy there. It's not his first job. When he sees you, he'll clear his throat and spit, because you're a German. Then he'll run off. Follow him. He'll see you don't lose him."

"Where will he take me?"

"Follow him, my dear. They'll probably expect a password from you." He made quite certain he wasn't overheard, "Say: *Grosse Stern*. Got that? Sure? After that . . . But that'll do to be going on with. You see, I have friends there, inside, who'll put you up."

"Inside," she echoed.

"The name is," he whispered, and looked round. Then he checked himself. "You'll find out later."

"Jews?" she asked.

He nodded. "Certainly. They'll have new papers for you."

"We'll be in touch?"

"Yes," he assured her.

"You're beginning to look restless. Ought you to be going?"

"The sooner I'm back at the office the better. I've got things to fix up."

"Four o'clock, you said?"

"Yes."

"What shall I do till four o'clock?"

"Stay here a bit. I'll order some sort of snack for you. Then go to a movie. Or go for a tram-ride."

"Where to?"

"Anywhere. Zoliborz."

"I've been there once."

"Then go again, darling. You know the way. Well, my dear——"

"Yes, my love?"

"I must go now."

"Kiss me, darling. You know you're my man. You always have been. You always will be."

"Till we meet again, darling."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

He ordered a snack for her, tipped the waiter heavily, winked heavily for the waiter's benefit, and left. He was back ten seconds later.

"Those papers," he said. "Do what I told you."

"Yes, darling. Oh, and by the way."

"Yes?"

"Sit down just one moment. What shall I do with all this?" Her eyes glanced down towards her handbag. "You know what's inside?"

"All your . . . stuff?" She nodded. "Well?"

"I don't quite like the idea of prowling round the place with all this on me."

"It looks just like any other handbag."

"Would you like to take charge of it?"

"You never know when you might need something. No, darling, take it."

"Sure?"

"Yes." He rose. "Those papers," he reminded her. "Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye, darling."



She sat thinking hard for some minutes after he left. "A not very glorious end," she said to herself, "for Herr General Wilhelm von Brockenburg and his Lady. I'd better do as he tells me." She rose, went over, and came back again. "What are you now, Elsie, my girl? A German, a Jew, an Englishwoman, a Turk? A cigarette-end, Elsie, an egg-shell, nothing-at-all."

The waiter laid a sort of *belegtes Brodchen* down before her. She gazed at the wafer of conglomerate meats with fearful speculation.

"But this brawn's not more nothing-at-all than you are, Elsie my love."

She could not dawdle indefinitely with her snack, all the more as she could no more eat it than she could eat the pink shade of the lamp-stand. She rose at length, tipped the waiter nicely, and left. She decided against a tram-journey to fill in the time. She had a feeling that in an occupied city people in uniform board public conveyances now and again and ask passengers for papers. She went to a cinema instead. The film they were showing was propaganda as well as entertainment. One of the scenes depicted an old Jew with ear-locks and skull-cap and caftan, lying in wait in the angle of a dark street. At last his prey appeared, a fair-haired young Aryan maid. The old Jew rubbed his hands. His two or three teeth glistened in the beam of the well-directed arc-lamp. Then he bustled forth, all arms and legs and hair, like a spider, and took his victim to himself. Two reels later the maiden was rescued by a posse of Hitler youths in armour, so many Siegfrieds. They beat the old Jew up with enthusiasm. The audience applauded loudly, but there was not much of it, so that the hallooing and hand-clapping sounded odd and unreal, travelling along the empty benches.

The picture continued; it was not very interesting. The audience grew by dribblets. Then she had a disagreeable moment. An usher came down the aisle, torch in hand, preceding a new customer, though the place was so empty he could very well have found a seat for himself. "This way!" the torch went. "This way!" towards a seat some three or four rows nearer the screen than Elsie sat. The torch lit up the features of another customer, a solitary gentleman. It was the man Glaeser. He seemed completely wrapped up in the picture, but he might not have been.

Had he just come? Had he been there all the time? Was it really the picture he was interested in?

She went out a few minutes later, trying to make her exit seem as care-free as might be. She was aware she had been thinking of the deadly creature all day long. She had glimpsed him, she thought, at least twice, and determined it was not him, of course it was not.

She went out of the cinema, turned sharp left, crossed the road, turned right again, assured herself that he was not now, at least, following her. Then she dived into a side street, and cut, and swerved, turned back, and cut



again. She was fairly sure she must have shaken any follower off her heels. But she was, after all, only an amateur. And he was a professional. She smiled wanly.

"I'm a bit old for this sort of thing," she murmured. "I'm getting tired, too, here at the back of the knees." She looked at her watch. "An hour to go. I'd better be making away from the river, hadn't I? Towards the west there, little brownie, the sun ahead of you." She trudged forward wearily. She was tired, really very tired. "I'm quite looking forward to it, getting Inside There. A Home from Home. Visit the Warsaw Ghetto for restful holidays."

The handbag was quite an embarrassment, too. It was, as Oskar had pointed out, an ordinary handbag. And, of course, it wasn't. There were moments when she felt the rays of the diamonds inside there must be thrusting out through the clasp, like the beams in a painted halo.

It was odd how much somebody else's they felt, not her own any more. They belonged to Elsie von Brockenburg, if to anybody, and not even to her, either. By and large quite a number of other folk had contributed to the kitty.

Still another half-hour, she saw. Will anybody trade a cup of coffee and a chicken sandwich against an emerald and ruby bracelet?

There were no takers.

### III

Oskar pressed the buzzer on his desk. A runner came in, a nondescript young gentleman, possibly a Balt, wearing a nondescript uniform. He was Aryan almost to the point of being Kalmouk. All the runners around in the Government General's offices in the Ghetto wore synthetic uniforms of one sort or another. They were not soldiers or policemen, but it was necessary to let the damned Jews know that those fellows were employed on official duties. They carried a bludgeon and a pistol to discourage impertinence.

"Pic!" proclaimed Oskar. "Go to that swine Wolff, the baker, at Gesia number seven. No, at his bakehouse. You know the one?"

Pic's eyelids fluttered very slightly, like a moth's wings. The lashes and the skin were moth-coloured, too. The pupils of the eyes were so colourless the whole eyeball seemed blank.

"*Jawohl!*" he muttered. The thin lips tightened till they were invisible. He liked jobs which meant a nice quick crack on the skull and no arguments. So did the authorities, for that matter. One less Jew to tackle in the general clean-up. Pic liked the feeling of the skull caving in on the mush below.

"Don't kill him," requested Oskar. "Bring him here."



The eyelids fluttered. Well, if not today, then tomorrow or next week. He lunged off silently, as if moving on snow-shoes over deep snow.

Pic was a quick mover, and no talker. Half an hour later there was a knock on Oskar's door, and Pic re-entered. Oskar looked up. Pic pointed behind his shoulder with his pale stub thumb.

"Don't stand gawking around there!" Oskar roared. "Bring him in!" That was the last thing that could be said of Pic, that he stood gawking around. He was out of the room like a slab of vapour. A few seconds later the man Wolff was standing in that place. There was flour all over his greeny-grey suit, for he had clearly been given no time to make himself more presentable for his audience with Herr Oskar von Straupitz-Kalmin, Director of the Food Control Office for the Jew Reservation in Warsaw. It had been a good suit. Both the cut and the cloth had quality. He was, doubtless, a master baker. He stood there, bowler hat in hand, for three or four minutes before the Generalinspektor deigned to look up. The master race could hardly be expected to acknowledge the existence of the Jew-swine race before at least as much time as that had passed. Then at last Oskar raised his head and yelled:

"What the hell d'you mean keeping me waiting like this, you lump of filth?"

The courtiers of the one-time Crown Prince of Germany, among whom this Oskar had been numbered, might have been a little shocked by this exhibition of *kleinbeamter* truculence; or they might once have been shocked. There had been deterioration in Oskar's character along various directions.

"I understood, sir, the consignment was for the day after tomorrow." The baker did not raise his eyes from the ground, but his demeanour was not abject. He felt for a paper in his pockets. "If I may present the document, sir——"

"Hold your snout!" shouted Oskar. The baker replaced the document. "Do you hear?" The baker nodded. They could hear twenty offices away. Then, in an almost inaudible voice, Oskar said:

"Come closer, Wolff."

Extreme caution seemed now Wolff's second nature. He looked round carefully, he paused to listen, then he moved two yards forward till he stood by Oskar's side.

"I want you to smuggle something *in* this time, not out," murmured Oskar.

"Goods?"

"No. A woman."

"Political?"

"Leave that to me. You'll do as you're told." Wolff shrugged his

shoulders. "I want you to get this woman into the Ghetto. She's a friend of mine. You understand? It's got to be done with the least possible delay."

"Jewish?"

"I think so. Oh yes, she is."

Wolff made an expressive gesture with his hands. Jewish, and she wanted to get *into* the Ghetto. The other way was far more usual, of course. Probably it was political, after all.

"You'll provide papers for her, Wolff."

Wolff nodded. That was a matter of routine.

"Has she a password?"

Oskar motioned to Wolff to bring his ear closer.

"*Grosse Stern*," he whispered.

"Good. Anything else, Herr Generalinspektor?"

"Yes. I'll want you to put her up in your house."

Wolff drew back.

"But, Herr Generalinspektor——"

"What have you to worry about? The papers will be all right, won't they?"

"Yes, but——"

"Don't get panicky, Wolff. I'll see to it that nothing happens to her. I want her to lie low for about two days, three at most. Then we'll get her out."

"I don't think you realize——" Wolff started. Then he stopped. "Very well, Herr Generalinspektor." He turned towards the door.

"I don't realize? That trouble's brewing? Oh yes," said Oskar icily. "I realize that well enough. That's why I'll lose no time in getting her off your hands." Then suddenly he raised his voice and bawled as before: "Don't answer back, Jew-pig! Till Thursday! Not a moment later! Clear out, filth!"

Wolff cleared out.

#### IV

Elsie had no difficulty in locating the bombed butcher-shop at the corner of Lucka and Wronia Streets. The youngster she was on the look-out for did not keep her waiting. Punctually at four o'clock he came sauntering up from out of a side street. She went over.

"Pooh!" the lad went; he cleared his throat and spat; then he ran off, as if overcome by the enormity of his foolishness. At the corner of Grzybowska he stumbled, and so made quite sure she was aware what direction he



was taking. She followed, up one street, down another, till at last the lad disappeared into the main entrance of a large block of flats, which had taken a considerable beating during the bombardment. The block looked all the more decrepit against the Ghetto Wall, which ran here north and south, quite spruce and tidy.

"Am I dreaming?" she asked herself. "Is this really happening? Or perhaps it isn't me it's happening to. I'm somebody else really, not Elsie Silver, once of Oleander Street, later of the Stadtgarten. Am I carrying a leather handbag crammed full of jewels or am I going round to Mrs. Poyser's with a string bag for the potatoes? If that tough one there had any idea what's in this bag . . ."

"What if he had?" (She had crossed the road by now and was at the entrance to the flats.) "A fat lot of use it is to me! For two pins I'd snap the clip open and chuck it all up into the air. What would I do with two pins? Let's settle for a ticket to Stockholm, one way, please."

The boy was peering down at her from between the rusty iron bars of the first landing. She winked at him. He shot away as if she had squirted a hose-pipe on him. She went up the stairway. She caught a fleeting glimpse of him in two inches of open doorway in the furthest door along the landing. Then he was not there. The door was pushed back against the lintel, but the lock did not fasten. She advanced to the door, wondered a moment whether to knock, thought it better not to; then she pushed the door open, and entered a small passage. She stood there for a moment. It was dark and musty. She suppressed a violent temptation to turn tail and run for it. Run where, you fool? She was given little time to consider the matter. The door opposite her opened, and a huge man in shirt-sleeves stood framed there. He had a vast curving belly and a head of clipped hair so red it glowed in the half-darkness.

"Who?" he asked, with his hands and eyes.

"*Grosse Stern*," she whispered.

"Come straight in," he said in Polish. Or she assumed it was Polish. She entered. He pointed to the door behind her. "Close it." That was clearly what the words meant. She closed the door, then went further into the room after him. He was alone. The small boy was not to be seen. It was a non-committal room, neither kitchen nor bedroom; there was a couch made up out of boxes with a palliasse thrown over them, and an old blanket. There was a table with a primus lamp. There was a sink with a few mugs and things on a shelf above it. There was one chair. That was all.

"I'm sorry," she said, "I don't speak Polish. You speak German?"

"*Aber freilich*," the man said. "But certainly." She thought it must be the Silesian accent. "Sit down." He was pointing to the bed. "So you're German, eh?" The red hair smouldered like embers.



She made a non-committal gesture. She felt she had been inadequately coached.

"Don't be frightened, *gnädige Frau*," he requested. "You're among friends." He roared with laughter. She looked round nervously. He didn't seem to mind if the whole block heard his trumpeting. "But I must say it beats me why anyone should want to go into *that* place! You'll be expecting to stay some time?" She did not answer. "Not that it's any concern of mine. A job's a job." The laughter rumbled again in his belly. "Well, I hope you'll make yourself comfortable." He turned away, drew the chair over to the table, and took out a pack of cards from the drawer. "Would you like a game of something? Have you any money?"

"I don't play cards," she said. She had done little else during the last three or four years.

"Well, well!" There was a sudden sharp yelp of laughter, then he ranged the cards before him as if for some sort of patience. He seemed to have put her out of his mind.

"Excuse me," she said. "Can you give me any idea how long I'm to stay here?"

He did not turn round.

"Till a couple of hours after midnight," he said. "You'll have time for a doss."

She was silent for some minutes.

"I'm sorry to disturb you again," she murmured. "But have you anything for me? Papers?"

"All in good time," he reproached her. "Is this America?"

She could not decide whether he meant he had not yet received them, or whether it was a little premature for her to expect him to hand them over.

She sat for a good many minutes, while the belly contracted and expanded against the rim of the table. It seemed to have a life of its own, like some large bulbous fish of the lower deeps. The skull, too, was odd. It was like a pyramid cut clean near its apex. She had seen pictures of tombs like that in primordial South American jungles.

She felt very small and sorry for herself. She did not like the man, but she would have liked him to take a little more notice of her existence, as all men had done all her life long, old or young, fine or gross. Who was he? What was it all about? Obviously he must be an agent for some black market ring that smuggled things into and out of the Ghetto. What things? She thought they were probably short of food inside there, at all events of the rich foods Jews were always so partial to, including herself. How many ducks per fur coat, she wondered; how many bottles of sweet wine per gold chain?

And what was the equivalent of a solitaire diamond ring in this tariff?



Good old Oskar! He had been trying to sell antique furniture when she had first met him, but he had been a rather sketchy businessman. He seemed quite competent now.

The thought of food, ducks and sweet wine, at once made her realize, as it always did, that she could do with a bite of food herself. She had eaten nothing substantial all day long. The minutes went by. Half an hour went by. The man finished off one game and started another. He was used to dealing with people who were in no hurry. There was always time to come face to face with the risks that lay waiting round the corner.

She heard herself talking. It was like the voice of a timid girl in a hostel run by dour nuns.

"You wouldn't have a bit of food around?"

"What would you like?" the man asked without raising his eyes. "A beefsteak?" That was too much for him. He roared at the joke till the belly flapped like a sail.

"Anything at all," she said, when the racket subsided.

He turned his eyes towards her. His demeanour was very serious now.

"I could get you something good," he said, "if you paid for it."

"I have no money," she said faintly. The thought of opening her handbag was as terrifying as a surgeon's knife.

"They never said anything about giving you a meal," he grumbled. "All right." He got up and went to a tin box that was in the corner. "Something to drink, too?" he wanted to know.

"If there's time?"

"There's time."

"My friends will make it up to you."

"It's to be hoped they will."

There was a hunk of bread in the tin and a hard lump of cheese.

"Do you want coffee?"

"Yes, please."

"I was thinking of making some for myself, anyway," he consoled himself. He handed her a lump of bread and cheese. "*Prima*," he declared. "Best quality."

"Thank you." The bread felt like stone, the cheese like metal. I'll soften it in the coffee, she told herself. Besides, I'd better get used to a reduced diet. I don't suppose I'll be feeding on the fat of the land inside there during the next two or three days, or however long it's going to be. But, of course, Oskar will see me right, she assured herself. At all events he won't let me go *hungry*. I wouldn't like that at all.

The man got the primus going, with a good deal of stink and cursing. He threw the coffee composite into the pan. It was queer how little coffee odour came out into the air.

"No milk," he said. "No sugar. It would have been different if there'd been money."

"I don't take either," she whispered.

He took two chipped mugs from the shelf above the sink and filled them with the thin brown bubbling liquid.

"Take this!"

"Thank you," she said humbly. She soaked the projecting points of the bread and cheese, then nibbled at them. "It's good!"

"*Prima!*" he said again. His hand was so large the mug looked like a thimble.

"Listen!" she said. "I'd like to ask you something, if you don't mind." The eyes swivelled round suspiciously.

"Yes?"

"I suppose it's hard to get . . . inside there?" She was aware of a curious reluctance to give the place its proper name. The sound and the look of it were in the last degree depressing. G-h-e-t-t-o. She shuddered.

"Not for some people," he shouted. Then he bellowed with laughter, as if he were in the audience at one of her shows, and she wasn't a singer, she was one of the funny men, cracking jokes. That was the way they used to laugh at Siegfried Arno. Funny how those old Kurfürstendamm figures kept poking up at her out of the past, like sticks that had been long ago carried away by a current, and—would-you-believe-it?—here they were again!

"The hard thing is to get out, when you're once inside there!" he assured her, when he had wiped his eyes.

"I noticed guards at the gates," she said. "So we won't get in that way, will we?"

"You can if you like. Your papers will be quite in order. Except that they might be made out in the name of some Polish woman. Then they'd pounce on you like a cat on a mouse. Because you don't speak Polish, do you? Then, of course, they might be made out in a German woman's name. But even that wouldn't be too good either. You've got some funny sort of accent." He looked at her curiously. "American? English? What's your game, lady?"

"Certainly not!" she said. "I'm German!"

"It's no business of mine." He shrugged his shoulders. "But I don't think they'd like the way you talk. Yet there's no need to let that get you down. That could be tackled, too . . . unless they've got wise to the dodge. It's been done quite a few times to my certain knowledge."

"What are you talking about, if you please?"

"It would take no time to boil up some water"—he looked over to the primus—"and make you a hot fomentation."

"I don't quite see what you mean." Her knees knocked unpleasantly.



"We'd slap it on your mouth boiling hot, and keep it there a minute or so. Then the way you'd talk they wouldn't know whether you're a Greek, a Jew or a Hottentot. See?" He rubbed his hands. He was having quite a good time.

"Of course, if it were necessary . . . there'd be nothing else for it." She was almost sick with fright. "But there are other ways, aren't there?"

"Sure," he said magnanimously. "Sometimes they're dropped."

"How do you mean? From an aeroplane?"

"No!" he guffawed. "Not from an aeroplane. Not bang on to the city. You've got to be miles and miles away for that! Oh, *that* goes on all the time."

"How, then?"

"Well, it's like this. The Ghetto isn't a regular shape, a square, or a circle, or anything like that. It juts out in bits and pieces, see. In one or two places it's been necessary to carry an outside street over a Ghetto street by a bridge, see? Or the other way round, see? Like a level crossing. You know what I mean?"

"Yes," she breathed. She was very confused.

"For instance, there's a bridge for Jew passengers at Chlodna corner at Zelazna. Every ten minutes all the traffic inside the Ghetto stops, while the outside traffic goes through. You might be smuggled in then, but they're on the look-out."

"Yes."

"Or we might try the Froget Silverplate Factory at Elektoralna." He seemed to be considering these alternatives very judiciously. "There's no entrance outside the Ghetto, so the Polish workers get on a bridge that takes them over the Wall, and up to the first-floor window of the factory. They get in there like a door, you might say. See?"

She nodded.

"It might be possible to let you down with a rope. Of course, it's dangerous. Those places are well guarded, and it's as likely as not they'll shoot. And besides, it's got to be organized in advance. You've got to distract the attention of the guards, and while they're firing the other way, you go swinging down on the end of a rope. Like a bundle of washing, see?" That touched the laughter off for a moment or two. Then he went on again. He examined her rather more closely than hitherto. "You're not the right shape," he said, "and you're too old. You can't make *me* think you're just a spring chicken." The depressing subject had not been handled so brutally before. "But that's all one to me."

"How shall I get in, then?" she murmured.

He paused and looked at her. For the first time he seemed to savour the fact that she was a lady, or at least dressed like one; and that, somehow, she talked like one, and held herself like one.



"Along the sewers," he said contemptuously. He was getting his own back on somebody for something.

She was silent for some moments. The stench slowly seeped into her nostrils. The rats dipped and tittered.

"Along the sewers?" she repeated at length, almost inaudibly.

"That's what I said," he told her. He turned away abruptly. He had finished his coffee and his hunk of bread. He got down to his cards again. She found she was not hungry. She could neither eat nor drink.

Half an hour went by, an hour and more. He took no more notice of her than if she were a bolster. He lit a foul-smelling paraffin lamp and went on with his game. It was almost as tiring sitting low down to the ground on that hard palliasse as it had been walking round the streets. She would have liked to lift her feet up and rest her back, but she found it an unpalatable idea to stretch herself out in that room, in the company of that man. The man himself in course of time seemed to get a little bored with himself, his cards and his client. He pushed the cards away, put his head on the table between his hands, and immediately started snoring, as if a handle had been cranked up inside him. An hour later, though it seemed much longer to her, the snoring just as abruptly ceased. He got up from the chair, stretched himself till all the bones cracked, and swung over towards the door.

"I'll be back soon," he mumbled, and went out. He was back quite a long time later. "Here you are," he said, holding out a dirty envelope towards her. "Your identity papers."

"Thank you," she murmured. She did not open it. She was without curiosity. Who was she now? Marta Zimmerman, typist, of Leipzig? Hersha Weill, shop-assistant, of Karlsbad? Did it matter? To anybody in the world? She placed the envelope inside her dress. The handbag lay beside her. She had not opened it even in the man's absence, except to slip her wrist-watch into it; it was far too exquisite and jewelled a wrist-watch. There had not been since her childhood so protracted a stretch of time during which she had not treated her face.

"I'll be off now," he told her. "I could do with a doss myself for a couple of hours. I'll be back, then we'll get going. Listen." He seemed to be about to express an idea which had occurred to him more than once, but he had not yet got round to it. "That fur jacket of yours. Will you want it in there? How about doing a deal?"

She had no idea at all what there was to prevent him tearing it off her back. Perhaps he only got his pay-packet when the goods were delivered reasonably intact?

"I'd rather keep it, if you don't mind," she murmured.

"Just as you like," he said crossly, "just as you like." He banged the door. His feelings had been hurt.



After some minutes she felt she might as well stretch herself out and try to rest. It would not be very comfortable without any sort of pillow, but it should ease the strain. It would have been helpful to turn the lamp down, but she was afraid of that; it looked as if it might go out altogether, and she did not want to be left in total darkness.

Of course, she told herself, the handbag. She had heard of soldiers making pillows out of their boots. She would make a pillow out of her bracelets and necklets. It would serve two purposes.

She lay down, and made herself as comfortable as might be. She realized she was agonizingly tired, and in some minutes, despite the sharp jewel that was digging into her skull, she was fast asleep. The sleep was quite dreamless. The next thing she was aware of was a hand tugging at her shoulder.

"Get up now," a voice was saying. "Time we got moving." A frizzle of red hair was hanging over her.

She rose. There seemed to be no interval between complete unawareness and complete awareness. This was the man that Oskar by devious means had employed to lead her into the Warsaw Ghetto. The path by which she would enter was the sewers. Her head was lying on the blanket, not on the soft substance of the handbag, the hard substance of the jewels within it. She turned her head on one side. There the handbag was, only an inch away.

She rose and took the bag in her hand.

"Don't be all night about it," he was saying from the door. She had, in fact, been uncommonly quick. She would have known from that remark, even if she had not known it before from the feel of the handbag, that he had rifled it.

"I'm coming," she said. Her brain was working with extreme clarity. She knew it was completely pointless to face him up with the theft. After all, he had not murdered her, and that would have been extremely easy. There was nothing to prevent him doing that now. That would be one way out of it for her, but a peculiarly silly one.

She was through the door now, and on the landing.

"This way," he said, and led her down the stairway. "Be very quiet!" He himself moved with a silence that in so large a man was astonishing. They turned away from the front door and out into the inner court of the flats, where a bomb had fallen in the further corner. They entered another doorway alongside the rubble and within there a broken door lying horizontally on its hinges covered a small hole.

"In there!" the man requested. "I'll go first!" He had a small torch, with the battery almost run out. It would not have been an easy performance, even for a young woman. It did not occur to the man to give her a hand; he had, apparently, not been paid for that. More than once she thought it was not possible for her to keep her hand-hold, either because



the rungs of the built-in ladder were so slimy, or because a sudden gush of stench made her pass out completely for several seconds at a time.

After a few minutes the progress was horizontal, with arched back and shocked recoiling finger-tips. Was that a rat that brushed against the ankle, or a lump of ordure?

"I am now passing under that Wall," she said to herself. "The Wall is probably behind me now. I am in the Ghetto. I've come back where I started, with as little as I had then. With far less. I had youth then. I had the years ahead. I now have a fur jacket stinking with filth and a leather handbag with a lip-stick and powder-puff. I haven't myself any more. I haven't even the name I was born with. Perhaps my name is Rachel Cohen.

"Well, I've not had a bad time. I had Oskar. Do you hear, Oskar? Are you still there, Oskar?

"It's not been a good time, either, these last few years. Somebody's making me a bill out somewhere, and I'm in the red. I'm sorry, Rachel Cohen. I haven't the least idea what I'm letting you in for.

"Hello? Yes? Who's that?" Somebody was calling. "Help! Help!" "Who's that? I can't hear you! *The Jews in the Ghetto of Warsaw call out for help to all the world! They are out to murder us, to the last man! Help!*

"But what's it got to do with *me*? What can *I* do about it?" *Help! Help!* The voice was fainter now. Her back was breaking with the strain of it all. The horizontal journey ended at length. They were climbing now, hand over dripping hand up the slimy rungs. Hours, days, years, had passed by. There had been no experience in her life that had taken up so large a portion of it. There was a banging on a trapdoor. Knock-knock, again knock-knock. The trapdoor was levered aside. A gush of warm air came through into the foulness, there was a dim light, a smell of yeast. She felt a thrust from behind, and slumped forward, exactly as if it were a sack of illegal flour that was being delivered. She was no more conscious than that. The arms of the man Wolff reached forward for her and laid her down on a heap of flour-sacks. The man with red hair waited no longer than to receive a small packet from Wolff's hand. He turned back into his darkness. The trapdoor was jammed to, and was invisible as before, behind a heap of fuel and baking-tins and various oddments.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### I

THE journey along the sewer under the Wall was soon over for Tania Polednikova, though the bags of baratol seemed heavier than before. It was dark and dank and smelly, but she had known ditches quite as noisome.



Pan Dymik knocked at the trapdoor, knock-knock, silence, knock-knock, silence, knock. A knocking came back from within. The trapdoor came away. No words followed, except a "Christ be with you!" as Pan Dymik went off again the way he had come. There was a man in the cellar there. He held a torch, which he flashed on to a heap of litter.

"Till after the curfew," he said in Yiddish. "You understand?"

"Yes, comrade."

"Good."

It was clear, beyond that, he was not going to ask any questions, and was unlikely to answer any. The contact man between the outer and the inner world was in a particularly sensitive position. The less he had inside his brain-pan the better. That way torture paid the least dividends.

She threw herself down on the litter, shifted the bands along her shoulders, and slept like a log. Despite her intense seriousness, perhaps because of it, she would have presented to a Westerner, if he could have seen her, the aspect of a Girl Guide, asleep on a leafy bank after a day of jolly games on Chancery-bury Ring.

She awoke some hours later. It was quite dark. No light seeped in from anywhere. She knew it was after five o'clock, because that was the end of the curfew-time, and she had told herself she must not be awake before then. She did not want to be moving before people were abroad in the Ghetto streets. She felt it was eight o'clock. She had acquired a useful sense of what time of day or night it was.

"You're still there?" she asked.

She knew the man was still there. Even though sound asleep, she would have known he was going, if he had risen to go.

"Yes," the man said.

"What time is it?"

There were slight movements in the darkness, for the torch, for the watch in the pocket.

"Eight o'clock," he said.

"Do we go now?" She rose from the floor.

There was the sound of his rising.

"Come!"

"I've brought some stuff with me," she said. As she rose, the edge of the bands tore like an edge of metal along her chafed shoulders. "I take it with me, of course?"

"Of course you do." He wanted no lot or part of it. He shone the torch so that she could see the way after him. The light made him aware, apparently for the first time, of the bundle she carried slung round her shoulder. It was a small bundle. The smallness rather disgruntled him.

54139

"Not much there," he said, and turned and moved off. The remark was rather outside his habit of reticence.

"Oh *that*!" she said, following. "That's food!"

He stopped in his tracks, as if he had come up against a steel bar. He stayed there, motionless, for ten, fifteen, full seconds. Then he turned round. He seemed rather less rigid than before, and there didn't seem quite so much of him.

"Food?" he asked. "Anything good?" It was almost the wistfulness of a penniless schoolboy outside a tuck-shop.

"Just a bit of cheese and bacon," she said. "It was for my employer. But I'm not likely to meet him."

He stood still for quite a time longer. She was not very sensitive, but the man in the darkness moved her quite a lot. She could almost hear the juices seething in the corners of his mouth. They had told her that they were on the smallest conceivable rations in the Ghetto, but so she had often been herself, and it had not impressed her imagination. It was different now, with that hungry man a few feet away, his belly churning and whimpering.

"Would you like this?" she said. "Here it is!" She handed it over. Then, for the first time, she realized the man had an arm missing. He swivelled his body half-round to take the small bundle from her. I think I see, she told herself, one arm. That's why he's not working; at least, why he's not working in one of their factories. She saw the effort he made not to make a rush for it, like a dog trained to stand back, even when a bone with meat on it is stretched out towards him. Then he trusted himself, at last, to take it.

"My wife," he said, "and the others. It's a long time since . . ." His voice was quivering. He stopped, and turned away. "Thank you," he added. "In Christ's name."

Her head came up as if somebody had struck her smartly under the chin. *In Christ's name.* That is not the way a Jew talks. It had not occurred to her there would be any others than Jews inside the Ghetto . . . except, perhaps, the half-dozen or so emissaries from the Party that might have arrived by now, and, of course, the Fascist gaolers.

"Are you a Christian?" she asked. "What are you doing inside here?"

"My parents were Jewish, and I'm Christian. But what difference has that made?" Then the tone changed. "And I'm not one of those, either, that got baptized when the Germans announced they were going to put up the Wall. Well, we'd better get going."

She followed the torch and the head and the thrusting shoulders towards the cellar door. Then another thought occurred to him.

"If the stuff's heavy, and you'd like to leave it here, it could be picked up later." It was obviously a job outside his normal province.



"No," she said. She suddenly felt an access of affection for her hidden load, awkward though it had become. "I think it will look as if I'm going to have a baby. That's happened even here, hasn't it?"

"Now and again."

"Let's move, then." She wasn't going to hand it over until she knew it was quite safe.

They left the cellar, along a cellar passage, into another cellar, and up a dank unsteady stairway. He stopped before a door that, doubtless, led into the outer world. Daylight slid in obliquely between frame and door.

"You follow me," he said. "Keep me in sight. We're actually on Nowolipki now. We turn left round to Leszno, then left again, and you'll see a church, the Church of Saint Charles Borromeo," he stressed, as if the Ghetto were as thronged with churches as Rome or Oxford. "Don't run," he said. "Put that bit of cloth round your head. Try and look as much like an old woman as possible. Understand?"

"Yes, comrade." She was beginning to get the feel of things.

"You won't see me after that. You go into the church, and kneel down at the Lady Chapel. That's the second on your right. In half an hour a man will come, and kneel down beside you. He'll drop his prayer-book. When he lifts it again, ask him the time. He'll say half-past two. It won't be half-past two. Then you can talk to him. Is that clear?"

"That's clear, comrade."

He put an eye to the ray of light within the door-frame. Wait, his hand signalled. They waited. She thought she heard the sound of feet passing along the passage. Then he was satisfied. Come now, the hand signalled. He opened the door swiftly, and she followed. They were in the passageway of a big block of flats, dirty, without character; you could not say whether it was derelict, or whether people still lived there. A moment or two later they were out in the street, the one-armed man ahead of her by a few feet. The brightness of the air struck her like a curtain flapped in her face, after those long hours of entombment. The April blueness of the sky was an assault. For some seconds the whole place wore an air of carnival, the sunshine was draped like huge hanging banners over the walls opposite. To intensify the illusion, there was a procession in line of three coming up the street with loud shouts. A full-cheeked man in uniform went ahead, with another man in the rear. One or two other men flanked the procession in its centre. The ear waited for a sudden thud of drums, the eye for the leader's baton twisting and twirling in the dancing air.

And then in a moment all the brightness died, though the sun shone exactly as keenly as before, and the white clouds lined with fire sailed as before across the blue space between the roof-tops. It was as if the sudden



inrush of oxygen into the blood-stream had cheated it like wine. But the reaction was instantaneous and severe.

There was a procession right enough. Some hundred or more males and females of all ages were being herded along the street, with an S.S. man before and behind, and two or three Jewish policemen along the flanks. The S.S. man in front walked with his nose high in the air, as if to indicate not only that he belonged to an immeasurably higher order of mammal than the creatures he preceded, but that their smell was offensive. The S.S. man behind was giving himself a good time with a cudgel. The Jewish policemen, marked by their Jew stars on breast and cap-peak, were doing most of the shouting, as if that way they might stifle the voice within them of grief and shame.

The procession was on its way to its work in a factory, or perhaps it was on its way back from work. For creatures so abject as these there was no distinction between day's beginning and day's ending. Tania had never seen people so woebegone. The young looked as old as the elderly, with those stooped shoulders, the shambling gait. They wore every sort of clothing, most of it tattered and shoddy now. It included the fur cap and gabardine of the native orthodox Jew, the dungarees of the artizan, the city clothes of professional men, who once, perhaps, had had offices in the Tauentsienstrasse in Berlin, or apartments overlooking the Seine from the Ile St. Louis. Some women wore a death's head relict of smart Western hats, others wore a kerchief, if they still possessed one, over the *sheitel*, the wig which among the women of the old dispensation takes the place of their own hair after they are married. But the eyes of all of them, Tania noted, as the procession drew abreast—the eyes were like lumps of sooty glass.

"But what can be done with them?" her mind was demanding insistently. "They're dead! They're dead! But I heard a rumour—didn't I?—that there was a rising here . . . when was it, December, January? There was shooting, there were several dozen Germans killed. Or was it in another city? These people are corpses." She was a worker and she had a job to do. But how can you make tables with sawdust or bullets with matchsticks? "Perhaps the Fascists know that these folk are dead and are marching them off to the cemetery to bury them." She was logical and ruthless, or the Revolution had taught her to be. What else is there for the dead than burial? "It must be different in the workshops! It was people from the workshops who rose in January. There they're alive! They're wood waiting for the torch!" Her jaw came forward. "And I've got some shavings to make the fire blaze up a bit!" She walked on.

The houses and shops were as desolate as these people who moved under them, all the shoddier under that varnish of sun-rays. The windows were almost all broken; some were stuffed with pieces of rag or balls of screwed-up



paper. Filth lay in the gutters and in the doorways. Doors were not there, or were off their hinges. You could not say whether people lived in this section, or had long ago been herded elsewhere in the successive diminutions of the Ghetto.

She turned left after her guide, as she had been bidden. From the plaque over the house opposite she saw they were in Nowolipka Street, as her guide had said. She learned, too, the name of the man who had once owned that house. It was a Jewish name. Where, she idly wondered, was that man now? Had he long ago toppled over into a grave dug by his own hands, or had he been baked in an oven somewhere in the east there? On the corner of the street there was a shop, she noticed, actually with goods to sell. Mustard, vinegar; a few bottles of pickles, of a sort of horse-radish, a sort of pale herring with bay-leaves. Rather curious, she felt, that the only commodity of which there was any supply at all should be this sort of stimulant food; as if the starved, exhausted appetite could only function at all if pickles were on hand to whip it out of its lethal coma.

There were a few sapless vegetables in another shop. There was a bread-shop with loaves on sale. Old women with ration-cards clutched tightly in their hands tottered up to the windows, stood there a moment or two as if cozening an illusion that it was up to them to decide whether they bought brown bread or black bread, or white bread, perhaps, the fine white *challoh*, coiled and varnished, which in other times on snowy tablecloths, under snowy napkins, they blessed on Sabbath evenings by the mild light of candles in brass candlesticks.

The procession had almost passed her. The S.S. man in front had not noticed her, partly because he would have noticed nobody lower than an *Hauptsturmführer*, and partly because she knew how to be unnoticeable. She had worked mainly in the woods, but there had been an episode in towns and villages now and again. She had a feeling that one of the Jewish policemen had looked in her direction, and wondered what a young woman was doing skulking along during worktime hours; but he looked away again quickly. He had enough already on his hands and on his conscience.

They had turned from Karmelicka into Leszno now, and there down the block were the two towers of a church. The church, the man had said, of Saint Charles Borromeo. Was that the name? This was the place right enough. The man hesitated one moment, and then carried himself away, his two legs, his one arm, the bundle of breathless treasure across his shoulder. The man who had come up out of darkness carried himself off into darkness, as men had often done in her brief life, the faceless, placeless, nameless ones.

She climbed the steps of the church, as if it were her daily habit to repair for solace here, in these woeful days, to Mary her Mother, and Christ her Lord. She had, in fact, never before entered a church, except one or two



that the Soviets had made into museums of godlessness, or the Nazis had made into stables. The place was light enough, with the sunshine pouring in through a shell-hole. There were lamps and tapers burning, but these were few. There was an altar, she saw, at the further end, to which she bent the knee, lest there should be anyone in the building who might notice it if she did not. She seemed to recall from some book that that was the way believers behaved when they went into churches. And was there not something about spraying yourself with holy water? But where did they keep it? She let that slip, it seemed complicated and risky.

She looked around. The place was barer than the churches she had known which had been made into museums and stables. The Fascists seemed to have carried off everything that was worth carrying off. There were no places to sit down, there were holes in the floor and walls where metal had been wrenched out. The Germans did not believe in allowing Jews anything more in the way of spiritual than physical comfort.

That must be the Lady Chapel he talked of, Tania told herself, with that big image in pale blue plaster. Yes, it is the second praying-place on the right. Two small lamps were burning before the Virgin's feet.

Ah well, thought Tania. I will get down on my knees to that image, that pipeful of opium. It is my job. How heavy this baratol is now! I won't be at all sorry to get rid of it.

The minutes passed. It might have seemed she was sunk in prayer. But she was not. She was beginning to think that a little something to eat would not be out of the way. It occurred to her that there was something about the atmosphere of this Warsaw which made people think rather insistently about food. Of course she could do no other than let that man have her small parcel of food, he wanted it so badly. But it might have been pleasant just to have a small lump of that cheese to nibble, while she waited here, kneeling to that lump of plaster.

Oh, by the way, she recalled. I wonder who I am? She looked around carefully. There seemed to be only one other woman and one old man in the place besides herself, and they were far off, near the principal altar. She removed the envelope from her blouse and took out her identity papers. They would think it was some piece of paper telling of a saint's good qualities, something of that sort. Miriam Bloch, she read. Jewish. She had been born in Ghent, in Belgium. She shrugged her shoulders. She had come a long way. She had been a dental surgeon's secretary. She put the papers back into the envelope again.

She felt a queer sort of pleasure knocking at her ribs. A dental surgeon's secretary? She would pull their teeth for them. Her nostrils were twitching, as they often twitched when there was excitement ahead, a bridge to blow up, a car in a convoy to send to blazes. She was hungry, but nothing to



cry about. She had had soup only last night with Pan Dymik and his wife. She had often gone for days without food, and she had done her jobs without thinking of it. But there was hunger in the air here. It was a sort of infection, and she had caught it. I wonder, does it perhaps take people different ways? she asked herself. Some go down and down, like most of those people in the work-gang I just saw. And to some people it is like alcohol, like vodka. I shall be very drunk, I think. Her lips tightened. The eyes were bright and dangerous.

The minutes passed. It was hard for the knees on the stone floor, but she stuck it. At last she was aware another believer had come into the church. He paused, then she heard his footsteps coming up behind her. He, too, it seemed, had a devotion to the pale blue plaster Mary. He knelt beside her, quite close. This was an old man, she saw, a working-man. He carried a cap in one hand, a prayer-book in the other. The prayer-book fell from his hand, and he lifted it again.

"Please, can you tell me the time?" she muttered, without turning her head.

"It is half-past two."

"Good," she said briskly. She proposed to lose no more time. "Has Berel still got that workshop?" She had withheld the crucial name till she had both feet inside, as they had instructed her.

"He has." He did not remove his eyes from the prayer-book.

"I've been walking a long time. There's a patch in the shoe. What's Berel making these days?"

"Belts."

She nodded. Yes, Belts. That was the response word.

"And nooses." She added that on her own account. That was incorrect, but she felt a trifle giddy. "Take me there. I want a job."

"You'd better get down again and wait for a train to come in. They'd send a group over, and you could file in with them." A few yards away you would have thought he was reciting his prayers.

"No." She spoke with decision. "Your job's to take me to Berel. Take me there."

"All right. Follow me in three minutes. Keep me in sight, along Karmelicka and Zamenhofa, up to the small Ghetto."

She turned her head interrogatingly.

"That's where we're all crowded now, up in the old city. Only factories and offices are out here. You should have known," he added crossly. He hated having to utter a word more than necessary.

She shrugged her shoulders. There was a lot had been going on here that had not yet been reported.

He rose and left. She followed. The journey took twenty minutes,



rather more. The streets became narrow and more noisome. The smells changed; there was a foetor in the air, though there were no more people apparent to the eye than in the more spacious area round Leszno. There was a sense of people hidden away in cellars, in basement rooms whose existence you did not suspect, because the buildings seemed bombed into rubble. The bombing had been peculiarly severe here, and fires had raged more furiously. Here and there the façades hung precariously, as if a breath would send them down. There were shops selling pickles and gherkins; no lack of these, a total lack of all things else. One shop had, astonishingly, a cob, a solitary cob, of maize. It held the centre of a store-window, unperturbed; as if it were a booby-trap placed there by an enemy, and if anyone moved it, seller and buyer would go up in smoke.

At length the contact man turned left from Zamenhofa. Niska, she read. He crossed the road, and stood for a moment up against the wall of a building a good deal lower than the buildings on either side of it. It was some sort of small factory or workshop; there was a van outside the door, with a non-Jewish driver, and an armed S.S. man beside him, picking his teeth luxuriously. The contact man stood there for some moments rubbing his back against the wall, as if a flea were biting him, as perhaps it was. Then he went.

Tania walked straight up to the workshop doorway, and through it, as if she had been doing it for months. She walked along the ground-floor passage, past a packing-room on her right, then saw a workman in an apron emerge from a staircase at the end of the passage that led below ground level. He held in each hand a heap of cardboard boxes piled on each other and tied with string. The product they made there was certainly not heavy stuff.

She thought it better not to get in the man's way; they were expecting him outside in that van. She went downstairs without hesitation and found herself at a half-opened door leading into a sort of cellar workshop. She thrust open the door and went in.

There were benches in the cellar, and some forty or fifty people, mostly men, working at them. There was a narrow door at the further end, another door in the right-hand wall. What light there was came in through the small grimy windows high up, close to the ceiling; windows too grimy to look through from outside. The men were clad in rags, silent, steady, industrious. They were shockingly thin, their cheeks so hollow that the heads looked like skulls with parchment roughly pasted over them. Their eyes had no light, no curiosity. Their fingers, pale white under the dirt coating, were dexterously mobile, unrelenting, ghoulisn somehow; like a sea-spider's feet that go on moving after the creature's death. They worked without pause, noiselessly. Six men, those nearest to the entrance, worked at German Army regulation leather belts; Waffen-S.S. belts, to be exact, for the metal badges,



which appeared on the belts as they passed through the stencilling machine worked by the sixth and last man of the team, sported the death's head and crossbones above the swastika. The dull eyes, the moving fingers, stroked the belts unrelentingly as they moved. The hammering of the stencilling machine was the only sound to be heard in the cellar workshop; and though the hammer-blow fell every ninety seconds, with an uncanny exactness, the people in the cellar jumped spasmodically each time, as if a cannon had fired at five yards' distance behind their backs. They jerked and went on working; there was no awareness of it in their conscious minds.

The children, particularly, jumped each time the hammer fell. There was more resilience in their bones. There were some ten or fifteen children there, in addition to the working men and women. There was also a handful of old folk so decrepit it was felt they would be less than no use working on their own account. There they sat, old folk and children, in front of or under the work-benches, staring before them, twitching every ninety seconds—apart from that, motionless.

Just as motionless Tania stood there, only her quick eyes moving from bench to bench, window to floor, wall to wall, taking note of every detail, like a camera or a sound-recording apparatus.

"So these are the workers?" she told herself. "But they're dead, too, corpses like those others I saw out in the street, with the S.S. men at head and foot. Will no one take his eyes from his work? Are they afraid? Do they think I'm an inspector? Or do they have so many loaves of bread to split up amongst themselves, and they think I'll steal some of their ration?"

No-one looked up. No-one was in charge. They seemed like some colony of insects who knew only by instinct what job they had to do. She went up to the nearest bench, and touched the old man working there on the shoulder.

"Tell me," she said in Yiddish. "Where's the boss?"

The old man looked up fearfully from under his steel-rimmed glasses, one lens of which was cracked across the middle. He tried to speak, but brought out only a few unintelligible syllables. It seemed as if he were stretched on a dreadful dilemma. It was bad to say anything. It was bad to say nothing. What shall a poor Jew do?

She thought, perhaps, she might find among the children one with an eye brighter than the others; she advanced further into the place in order to find one, but each seemed as woebegone as all the others. She observed, at the same time, that at the benches remoter from the entrance it was not belts the Israelite workers made, no sashes for daggers, no whips, nothing that pertained to Egypt's armed might. They produced fashionable ladies' handbags and ornamental leather caskets and artificial leather flowers. The last man in the row, an old man with a fine silver beard which grew in odd tufts



as if it had been facetiously torn out some time ago, had before him a bottle with some obviously precious substance which looked like liquid gold; he handled it with extreme care. He took up each of the almost completed leather roses or leather orchids, and with an artist's ease and punctilious dexterity he gilded here a flower centre, there an ornamental rim. He held his head sideways to his job, like a bird; for one of his eyes was gone, plucked out at some time. A red scar was visible on the bald pate; a burn mark, as men brand their cattle.

She wondered whether she might extract a word from this old man, when of a sudden she became aware that there was one more person in the room than there had been when she entered it. He stood beyond the benches, over against the narrow door in the rear wall. He must clearly have come in that way, but with extraordinary silence. He was a big man, with one broad shoulder, and one narrow slumped one. Yet he had a curious property of shadowiness, you might almost say transparency. She looked up into his face; you could not say if it was a young man's or an old man's. The eyes were almost as if they were not there, as if you looked through two jets of grey smoke to the wall beyond.

She went through between the benches and addressed him. This was her man, she knew.

"I've come a long way," she said. "There's a patch on my shoe."

"What do you want?" His voice was as toneless as the colour of his skin and the dingy suit he wore. "There are no jobs here. You must come through the proper quarters."

"This is Berel's factory, isn't it? I come from Berel's sister-in-law."

"Go in there." The head gestured towards the narrow door behind him. There was a small passage, with the wash-place on the left, and on the right a narrow backroom. "What did Berel's sister-in-law have to say?" There was a note of menace in the man's voice. It was not at all too late to fasten those enormous hands round the throat and squeeze the life out of it.

"She said the fish can fly," Tania recorded.

"There will be soup," the man said. "In there. I am Mickal."

There was an iron stove in the backroom, surrounded by odd bits of wood for burning—chair-backs, picture-frames, gilded and fluted fragments of old-time furniture. A large pot was on the stove, a young woman watched over it, stirring the contents with a wooden spoon, not looking up, in utter concentration. Three other women and an old man, each with a tin mug, standing there in a row, were watching her. They looked like a delegation, chosen and ordered here by the workmen in the front room, with the sole remnant of initiative left them, to see that nothing happened to the day's meal, no spilling, no spoiling, nothing underhand. They stood staring at the cook, they did not turn their heads, they did not look up.



Ten seconds passed, twenty, slow, breathless. Then the cook spoke.

"The key! I've not put the garlic in!"

There was a locked cupboard in the wall. The key was produced by a member of the delegation. The door was opened. It was the larder, and it contained precious little: a packet of flour, dark-grey like mud; a few cabbage leaves and some miserable potatoes; a bone or two. There were two knobs of garlic on the upper shelf. The cook removed one of them and cut it in half. The others did not take their eyes off her. The other half was put back, and the cupboard locked. With extreme care the half-knob of garlic was cut, and cut again, and dropped into the slowly boiling soup.

As the odour of the soup came up, the mood of the onlookers changed to one of an almost festival expectation. The soup was now nearly ready! There was a slight movement by Tania's side, such as a dog makes when, though not wishing to presume, he would like you to be aware of his presence. Tania turned, and saw half a dozen or more of the children, she could not tell how many, who had drifted up out of the workroom as silently almost as a drift of leaves, and stood there, in the dark passage and across the threshold. There they stood motionless, silent, like their elders, their mugs in their hands. The soup was nearly ready! A tiny girl of four, or five, or seven—who could tell?—stood among the children, black-haired, blue-eyed. A light was in her eyes. "The Soup!" she said, quite quietly, then dropped to the brick floor.

"Sit down there!" said Mickal. He pointed to a low bench against the wall. "They must have their soup first. You too." He took a mug off a nail, doubtless his own. "Here." He dipped it into the pot, and handed it to her, steaming. He used his right hand all the time. The left hung at his side, apparently quite useless.

"No!" she said, and tried to hand it back. She did not see how she could deprive these people of even a thimbleful of their soup.

"Take it!" he said. He was not to be argued with.

Someone had pushed aside the little girl who had fallen to the ground. She would either recover soon or she would not. The delegation was beginning to ladle out the soup. There was no pushing or scrambling. Neither old or young had energy enough for that. Some had supplementary rations tucked away in their jackets or blouses, which they removed and unwrapped with trembling fingers. Some had potatoes, some crusts of bread. The stuff was broken up and dropped into the soup with extreme care. Bread seemed particularly precious.

"How much do they get?" asked Tania. "Is there a bread ration?" She had a precise academic mind.

"Officially one hundred grammes every other day," Mickal said. "The Poles out there get one hundred and fifty every day. Usually the Jewish



ration is not there. Sometimes there is a *kasha* on the market." There was no spark of colour in his voice. There seemed none in his mind.

"I'll have to have facts," she murmured. "Will you give them me?"

"You'll get what is due to you."

"Your left arm," she asked, on a sudden impulse, "what's wrong with it?"

"They broke the shoulder-blade with a coal-hammer." The voice was exactly as toneless as before. "Here's some bread. Break it in the soup." There was no kindness in the voice, any more than one displays kindness to an oven when one is stoking it up. If it is not stoked up, it will not do the job.

The workers were coming in for their soup, and going out with it again to their benches. Some devoured it on the spot. Half a minute's delay was beyond their power of self-control. The black-haired, blue-eyed child was no longer there. Perhaps she had crept out. Perhaps she had been pushed out of the way into a dark corner.

"You're not eating your soup!" said Mickal harshly. "Eat it! It represents one hundred and twenty calories when it's hot. When it's cold it's ninety-five. We have a panel of nutrition experts who worked it out. We have the analytical sheets. Eat it!"

She obeyed.

"Thank you, comrade."

The workers came and went. The last had gone back into the workshop. The delegation took their helpings. The woman remained behind to clean out the pot with hot water and straw and a piece of sacking. Then she, too, went. Tania and Mickal were alone. He turned to her suddenly.

"You've brought something?"

She patted the hanging bags in front and behind.

"Twenty pounds of baratol."

You could almost have said a gleam slanted across Mickal's eyes.

"Good. It's about time."

"I'm not the first?"

"No. There've been three before. You'll be meeting them. Only two brought their parcels. The other one had to get rid of it, but he managed to bring himself along."

"There should have been about eight by now," she pointed out. "I'm two hundred and nine."

He shrugged his shoulders. Who could guess where they were now . . . shot, hanged, rotting in what ditch?

"Is two hundred and four here?" she asked. "Blum, they call him?" He shook his head. "I was to work under him. "Well," she said briskly, "I'll have to take over. You'll lead me to Berel. Do I take the stuff along?"



Or have you a dump here? Not in there, of course?" She looked across to the locked cupboard.

"Of course not," he said. "They've been through that five times already. It always excites them. They forget each time they've been there before. This is another Berel," he pointed out to her. "I'll take you to him tonight. Come." He rose, and she followed. "You'd better know where this dump is. There are others."

Taking a torch from his pocket, he opened a door in the longer wall, which led into a dark passage. The passage in turn descended by a rickety wooden stairway into the cellar. But it was not the cellar that interested him.

"Round here!" he requested.

They turned and thrust themselves under the stairway. He listened for a time, was satisfied, took a file from his pocket and loosened some vertical boards. The disengaged nails grinned dangerously. A moment later she was beside him, in the dungeon that lay beyond there.

"Bone-dry!" he said with pride. "You can take your load off now. There's room on that shelf!" He pointed the shelf out with his torch. She slipped the blouse and skirt off and removed her *tsitsis*, her "fringes", as she had humorously described them to herself. It was quite unpleasant lifting the bands from the galled shoulders.

"That's a good thing," she murmured, as she lifted the stuff into place on the shelf. "Good luck!"

He let the torch roam around a bit. It was all very satisfying, the boxes of grenades, the canisters of explosives, the piles of rifles, the collection of machine-guns, the belts of ammunition.

"That's fine!" she said. They both made for the aperture. One does not dawdle long in secret arsenals with the way-in gaping. They regained the upstairs passage. "Now?"

"We'll go through the books," he told her.

## II

It was expected of her that she should go through the books. On receiving her assignation in Russia, she had sought to acquire what information was extant; since leaving, she had acquired a little more. But little was known so far among her own people, or in the world at large, about the performances of the Fascists in the Polish General Government, though there was contact all the time by means of short-wave radio and illegal newspapers. It was a fact that even the victims themselves, both Poles and Jews, were to a considerable extent ignorant of what was going on, for the attempt



was made with considerable success to seal off the various "laboratories" as they were called, from each other. But the details of the picture, of the series of pictures, were being filled in all the time. The figures of debit and credit were being entered in the ledgers.

So to the Russian Jew girl, Tania, the Polish Jew, Mickal, presented the account to date. She knew for her part it was not wholly likely that she would get away from all this—the journey to the Ghetto, the sojourn in the Ghetto, the journey home again. But if she got away, they would expect as complete an account as she could draw up. Added to the accounts of such other emissaries as survived their mission, Headquarters should be able to compile a dossier which would be valuable both for the archives and for purposes of internal and external propaganda. The Warsaw experiment, in association with the similar experiments in Lublin, Treblinka, Oswiecim, was, after all, an important episode in the grandiose Fascist programme, important both in itself and in its indications of future possibilities on an even vaster scale.

The office was in the room that led out from the door in the right-hand wall of the workshop. Its books were in apple-pie order; the Fascist authorities showed exactly the same efficiency in the organization and supervision of the phantom industries, those that had no legal existence, as of the legitimate industries.

So Mickal and Tania spent some hours over the books. It was his job to take her through them, and he fulfilled it. There were moments when he made his exposition with a note of irony which was positively unhealthy, deviationist you might say. It was disconcerting, too, issuing from a mouth so black with shadow, overhung by eyes so lightless as to seem like a dead man's. She was concerned in her mind whether, in making her final reports, should she ever get round to them, she should not put a little question-mark opposite his name.

It was quite simple, Mickal said over the ledger, if one but looked at it with proper detachment. There had been five hundred thousand or thereabouts in this part of Warsaw town when the Nazis came. Jews, mostly; rich Jews up Leszno way, poor Jews in the rabbit-warrens of Nalewki, middle-class Jews in between and all over the place. There had been Zionist Jews looking towards Palestine; orthodox Jews looking towards the Lord God and nowhere else; Jews who, thinking of themselves as chiefly Poles, hoped to go the whole hog, and did all they knew to ingratiate themselves with governments as anti-Semitic as almost any in Europe; Bundist Jews of the Second International, and, finally, many scores of thousands of Jews who were not religious, not nationalist, neither right nor left, for the good reason that in those cellars beneath the cellars where they conducted their crepuscular



existences they were too wretched to care whether there was a Russian Czar on top or a Polish president.

Now was there anything more charitable, asked Mickal gravely, than the desire of the conquerors to lock the Jewish rabble safely behind a Wall, if only to protect them from the boiling passions of the Polish, Ukrainian, Latvian and Lithuanian patriots? Charitable was the word, seeing that those same Jews had invented Bolshevism, contrived the Presidential victories of the Jew, Rosenfeld, held Churchill in a permanent state of inebriation, and had bribed Chamberlain to declare war on the peace-loving Reich. Why, was not Stalin a Jew called Moscheles, while Eden's real name was Cohen? It was downright softheartedness on the part of the Nazis to abstain from more drastic measures. So they had converted a certain comfortable section of Warsaw city into a Jew reservation, withdrawn the few Gentiles who had lived inside it, pushed in the Jews who had strayed to other quarters, and put up a sanitary ten-foot-high Wall round the whole lot.

As for food—well, of course Germany wouldn't let anyone starve. One has certain human standards, after all. The Poles, being half human, half apes, *Untermenschen*, as anyone might confirm in any racial text-book of repute—the Poles got half human rations, half German rations, naturally. A Jew, by human standards, was half a Pole! That's an easy one.

Calories? Did you ask calories? (Tania had not asked about calories. Calories were by way of being a major preoccupation of Mickal.) The Jewish rations meant seven hundred calories a day, whereas you need at least two thousand three hundred to keep alive. Well, who cared for new-fangled Jewish inventions like calories? Men, women, children fell dead in the Ghetto streets. If they died, they died. Nobody had laid a finger on them. What was more, the authorities handed over all the privileges and emoluments of interment to their own Councillors. They had even reserved for the Jews a luxurious burial ground within the Ghetto precincts. There was room for everybody in it.

Could it be said by the sentimental plutodemocracies that anywhere within *their* confines they had reserved a Jewish territory ruled exclusively by Jews—a home from home? The Germans had conducted droves of impartially neutral journalists over the model place—Spaniards, Finns, Bulgars, Vichy-French; they had been speechless with admiration.

The Jewish Councillors would rather stand back and wash their hands of all responsibility? They would, would they? (Mickal's irony was carrying him away. He was ahead of her. She bowed her head and listened, and went on making her mental notes.) It was just like them! And who was to look after the picking up of the dead in the Ghetto streets? Who was to take in the cash for the Voluntary Contributions to the Greater German National Loan? To collect the Jews' Tax? The Extra Jews' Tax? The



Additional Extra Jews' Tax? The Jews' gold and silver and jewellery and foreign currency? The bicycles, the winter clothing, the goloshes, the boots, that were fit for Aryan wear? The gold teeth, the dentures? Resign, would they? And who, if they resigned, was going to be responsible for the delivery of army uniforms, the belts, the rugs, the revolver casings, the small arms ammunition, turned out by the two hundred factories set up by the conqueror inside the Ghetto walls? Was this filthy Jewish rabble expecting to enjoy the largesse of Greater German protection for nothing? For the sake of their beautiful eyes?

The resignation of the Jewish Councillors, Mickal announced, was rejected. Even Nazi patience would in the end exhaust itself and be forced to make the Councillors see reason and toe the line. Why, they even gave these Jews their own Jewish police, seven hundred Jewish and half-Jewish-Polish toughs locked in the Ghetto according to racial law, to control the rabble. With an ex-Jewish Pole, a Warsaw ex-policeman, as chief constable. And world Jewry still blathering of Nazi atrocities!

There had been five hundred thousand Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto on July the twenty-first, nineteen hundred and forty-two. Himmler had been in Warsaw that day and had had a conference with his Gestapo henchmen. On the evening of that day, the Jewish Councillors were summoned to Gestapo House, in the Ghetto, a modern six-story building, number thirteen Leszno Street. They were told it had been decided at one and the same time to ease the congestion in the Ghetto and to advance the Greater German war effort. A humane measure had been decided in the Jews' favour, an unexpected gift. A number of Jews were going to be sent a little further east, to destinations that would not be disclosed just yet for reasons of military security. They were going to be given a chance to do useful work there, according to their professions or trades; moreover, their wives and children were going to be allowed to go along with them. A gift, indeed, in accordance with the Führer's well-known patience and magnanimity.

Would the Councillors, therefore, please arrange for the first six thousand Jews from the Ghetto to be assembled next morning at six a.m., ready for the Journey, in the *Umschlagsplatz*, the improvised goods yard square, at the head of the new railway track they had led from the Danzig Station into the Ghetto on Stawki Street, to handle the produce of the two hundred Ghetto factories working for Germany? And would the Councillors please make it quite clear to their fellow Jews that all this was a favour—the Führer's own gift to his Jews?

The Councillors felt a little uneasy about the Führer's gift. They recalled another gift offered them in the Führer's name by the same Gestapo official in the same office a short time ago. The Jewish Community had been granted, by a spontaneous impulse of Nazi magnanimity, the licence to run a



first-rate large-size brothel, to be stocked with the prettiest of the Ghetto girls, for the use of Nazi officers, N.C.O.s, and men. The Jewish Community would make a pretty penny out of it. The Führer's gift! As for the authorities, they were ready to concede they did not consider the use of Jewish women by German men a pollution of Aryan virtue, any more than Aryan virtue was defiled by the use of Jew-made toilet equipment. If it was the other way round now—that was another matter.

The authorities had been quite annoyed when the Councillors turned the proposition down. They had themselves to go to all the bother of setting the brothel up on military lines, with an N.C.O., and a member of the *Deutsche Frauenschaft* in charge of the Jew-girls that had been trapped in the streets and carried to the establishment.

No, the Councillors had not been too easy in their minds about this new gift from the Führer. Work in the East, eh? Six thousand? Which six thousand?

Oh, said the official, any six thousand you choose. Names don't matter. What professions?

Professions don't matter, either, so long as there are six thousand head.

Belongings, luggage?

Forget about the luggage, said the official. They won't need it where they're going. He corrected himself quickly: not at once, anyway. Let them just pack their things and hand them over to his men; they would be sent after them in a day or two. Just a matter of transport difficulties, he said friendly.

The Councillors felt uneasy. Six thousand, eh, they said, and scratched their heads.

Yes, said the official, changing his tone. Six thousand Jew-pigs daily; every morning at six a.m., beginning on the twenty-second of July.

On July the twenty-second, six thousand went on the Journey, said Mickal. Six thousand two hundred and eighty-nine, he corrected himself. He had a good head for figures. They possessed a document in their dossier, he said, which gave the exact figures. The Germans were the statisticians of their own frightfulness. The document had been stolen from Gestapo Headquarters, from the Sturmbannführer's desk. Well, not exactly stolen. They had got it through the eminent Herr Kahn. She would hear more of the eminent Herr Kahn, and the not less eminent Herr Ashkenazi. They were the liaison, as it were, between the Nazi officials and the "phantom" Ghetto industries and industrialists. The Party did not maintain direct contacts with these gentlemen. In this instance—well, at all events Herr Kahn did not steal the document, but bought it from a Gestapo official for one hundred and fifty U.S. dollars cash down, plus twelve luxury leather handbags to be sent back to the official's wife in Leipzig.



"There is a copy here, as a matter of fact," said Mickal. He produced it from an innocent-looking concertina file. One of the Underground journals had been printing excerpts. These were the statistics signed, receipted, rubber-stamped. There: reference No. W. 37, VII/1942: "Index of Jews Sent on Journey from Ghetto of Warsaw." There: 6289 on the twenty-second of July. And 7815 on the twenty-third. 7444 on the twenty-fourth. Further data? August the sixth, for instance, when the authorities declared things weren't moving fast enough and asked that henceforth twice as large a contingent should be sent on the Journey, the figure jumped to 11,454. That was the day when six of the Councillors committed suicide as a protest. They were not the only deaths. There were sometimes quite a number of Jews who had to be despatched before the trains set off. "Sent to the Cemetery," was the official term. All duly recorded. Here on this supplementary sheet: "List of Jews Sent to Cemetery." You see?

These were the passengers who would not have survived the Journey. It was recognized that the cattle-trucks were a little austere. Oh, had he not mentioned the fact that the Journey was made in cattle-trucks? Yes, they were packed off, one hundred and fifty to each truck, the floors hygienically caked in lime. A bit tight. Oh yes. The last thirty or forty had to be shoved over the heads of the others, right over, somehow. It was this that led to that hysterical assumption, that latrine rumour, that something awkward was in store for the travellers at the end of the Journey. This rumour was to be deprecated. The very fact that they first segregated those unfit for the Journey proved the contrary. Why should they go to all the trouble of segregating them and holding them back if they did not intend to play fair by the travellers? There was even a rumour that those segregated to be Sent to the Cemetery were buried alive there. That, too, was to be deprecated. Perhaps the comrade would care to refer again to the supplementary document: those Sent to the Cemetery on July the twenty-second numbered 37. Next day—there: 515. And 44 on the twenty-fourth. Just the unfit. Or there, the day the Double Ration started, August the sixth, it was 1369 who were Sent to the Cemetery. Not to be buried alive. Not at all. To be machine-gunned, humanely. If any were buried alive, it was a mere accident; not more than 118 in three months were found still alive at nightfall when the Jews dug them out again—there! Quite official!—out of a number of 11,580 Sent to the Cemetery in those two months. It just showed how people would start rumours and undermine morale. The total number Sent on the Journey within those same two months—there! 265,954. Sent on the Journey to some sinister end? A rumour. To be deprecated.

Mickal stopped for some moments, then added lightly: "My own wife and my little daughter have gone on the Journey. So there. I am not



worried in the least. She's a doctor. Presumably she's doing a good job of work out there in those labour camps. That's what they took her along for, undoubtedly. A bit haphazard, the way they picked her up off the street, with the little girl holding her hand. The day's total for the Journey was not complete, so they had to go round a bit, collecting. Yes, a bit haphazard, certainly. I was doing a job of printing at the time, nicely out of the way. A friend of mine happened to see it from her window. Well, there we are. She's out there, somewhere. She hasn't written yet, true. Eight months. But none of them have written. No postal connections. There's a war on. It doesn't mean a thing, not a thing . . ."

Mickal's voice trailed away. A complete silence fell between them. Out in the workshop every ninety seconds the hammer of the stencilling machine fell sharply.

"He can't think I'm a fool," Tania said to herself. "He knows I know. I suppose they all talk like that. Is he mad? I can't trust him, somehow. He's morbid. He's too clever. He can't be a good Socialist."

She felt she was out of her depth, and she didn't like the experience, somehow, because she had a good conceit of her faculties, both physical and mental.

"He's a Westerner. He's from the old world. He's a hangover. Thank God we've outgrown all that."

Her mouth was prim. She was, at that moment, a priggish young lady.

"She's a doctor," he was saying. "She's a doctor." As if that had a lot to do with it, somehow. He was like a corpse talking.

Her flesh was beginning to creep. It was all unpleasant, faulty in the extreme.

"You mentioned the underground press," she said sharply. "Are there any recent leaflets you can show me? I'm expecting a report of your activities under the various relevant headings."

His head turned to her slowly, as if his skull were a piece of mechanism controlled not from within but from without.

"Yes, comrade," he said. "You shall see everything. You shall see a good deal." He smiled, for the first time since she had set eyes on him. The smile was like a small cold creature that had come up from a grave.

"Come, then! Let's get to it!" she shouted suddenly, with a lack of control of which she was instantly ashamed. "If that's all right by you," she added lamely.

He rose without a word, and left her there, quite alone, for several hours. There was no sound anywhere except the hammer-beat of the stencilling machine, every ninety seconds, quite short and sharp.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

## I

AN hour passed by, two hours, and Elsie Silver still lay, quite unconscious, on the heap of flour-sacks in the bakehouse of Wolff the baker.

"Let her sleep," Wolff said to himself. "She'd only be in the way if she was awake. She might as well doze on till curfew's over."

He went on with his work, though there'd been precious little flour, legal or illegal, delivered into the Ghetto these last few days and there wasn't much to do.

"I might as well wash one of these sacks for Saba. It'll keep her quiet," he murmured. He got on with it. "The men will be coming soon. Oh well, she won't worry them. They've seen one or two others come up and go out this way."

Still another hour passed.

"Is she dead, I wonder?" he asked himself. "The Generalinspektor wouldn't like that for a bit. What the devil does he want her in here for? If he just wanted her to play with, he could have fixed her up in the German City. And what on earth induced her to come in here of her own free will?" He scratched his head. He was very puzzled. He went over to her. She was breathing right enough. She seemed rather troubled in her dream; there was a tiny whimper, like a dog. He could just make out her face in the dull glow from the oven door.

"It's a rather beautiful face," Wolff decided. "She's not young any more, but she's still quite beautiful. I suppose all that filth on her hands and clothes got her down. She must have slipped. If she had a hat, I suppose that's when she lost it. We'll have to clean her up a bit before we set out, or she might attract attention. Have I seen that face before anywhere? It looks familiar, doesn't it? I suppose I'm seeing things."

Another hour went by, and still she did not get up. He began to get alarmed. One death more or less in the Warsaw Ghetto counted not so much as one loaf more or less; but it was different when the person involved was the woman of Generalinspektor von Straupitz-Kalmin. The Generalinspektor could make things very awkward for him. In return, that would mean one racket less for the Herr Generalinspektor, but with a woman in the case that perhaps wouldn't matter so much.

He got to work on her. He dragged her arms, pulled at her shoulders.

"*Gnädige Frau!*" he called. She was obviously a lady. Had Straupitz-Kalmin said she was German? No, he'd said she was Jewish. As likely as not she was German, too. They'd probably known each other in the good times back in Germany somewhere.



"*Gnädige Frau*, get up! It's time! We must start moving!"

She at last slipped back into consciousness. Her eyelids fluttered. The breath came short and heavy.

"Go away!" she said. "Go away! Not time yet."

"We must get out of it!" he insisted.

She turned away from him.

"Tired. Big night. Not time yet."

The breath was steady again. She was sound asleep. He looked at his watch.

"I'll give her half an hour. Then I'll have to get her up. A little cold water will do it."

He spent the half-hour cleaning her up, calling in one of his men to help him. It'll do no harm, he thought, if she tells the Generalinspektor I tidied her up a bit. It might mean an extra half-hundredweight of flour. Then he brought cold water to bear on her. That brought her to at last.

"We've got to get going," he told her. She was on her feet now. Her hair hung down dank and pitiable.

"Yes, of course," she said submissively.

"You know where you are?"

"Of course," she said. "In Warsaw. In the Ghetto."

He breathed a sigh of relief. That was all right. He would be able to get her to his flat on Gesia. He hoped Saba would be in one of her good moods. She knew about her guest already, of course.

### *In Warsaw. In the Ghetto.*

It was with her lips Silver Elsie uttered the words, and, of course, a certain portion of her mind instructed her lips to form them. On that level she was aware that it was in a bakehouse she woke up, not in her bedroom in the Tiergartenstrasse, with Brauner tugging and pulling at her, insisting they were expecting her for a rehearsal that morning. She was aware that it was into a Warsaw street she was emerging, the man Wolff holding her arm, and not into a Berlin street, or a Doomington street.

But whether that function of her mind was on the surface or deep down, it was fragmentary, sporadic. For the most part it was overborne by the illusion that this was Doomington long ago—long ago.

She was only eleven years old, in fact. She had walked down Aubrey Street and had turned round Victoria Street towards the little park there, where she had intended to go to the bandstand and talk to the boys, who gave her pineapple rock if she kissed them, and gave her more pineapple rock if she did not kiss them this time, but she would kiss them next time, God should cut my throat before I die.

She saw the bicycle coming when she had already stepped down from the



pavement into the street. The cyclist was on the proper side of the road right enough, and she should just have stayed where she was for a moment. But she went on; so he should have put his brake on. He went on, and she went on. He was afraid to swerve over to the right, because a tram was coming up Victoria Street. They both saw it coming, but they kept on as if compelled by some awful hypnotism. So he knocked her down, and he was moving quite fast, and she fell on her head, and there was blood, and she felt very funny, and she was frightened. A crowd collected round her, and was very sympathetic, and that made her still more frightened, because she was seeing stars, and she wondered whether she was going to die. Everybody shook their fists at the cyclist, and uttered angry noises at him, and he, too, must have been frightened to death, all the more because his front wheel was buckled, and he couldn't get away, and there were a lot more instalments to pay on the bicycle. "Poor little girl!" they were all saying. "It's Elsie Silver!" somebody announced. "The Silvers from Oleander Street," somebody supplemented. "Sam Silver, one of his little girls!" But nobody did anything, and she suddenly saw a big stain of blood on the cobbles, like those big red flowers in the park flower-beds, what do you call them? Then she was certain she was going to die. And still nobody did anything—what fools they all were, really!—and she was crying, and her head aching was like anything.

And she was so ashamed, too, of the awful sight she looked. She was much the best-dressed of those five Silver daughters, even at that age; it was quite a scandal she made herself look so smart, as if she was Levi, the rich furniture-shop, their daughter. She looked awful, and there was a smell, too, deep inside her little fur coat, it was from the sewer under the wall, and what had happened to her hat, her hair must be like a rook's nest . . .

Then somebody was mopping away at her forehead there in Aubrey Street. He was a tall man, his straggly beard came down towards her. He was holding her arm and taking her round the corner of Victoria Street into Aubrey Street, and he was saying: "Such a year upon them, and their bicycles! They should be locked up! It's all right, Elsie! There now, Elsie, there!" And he put his hand into the back pocket of his frock-coat—he must have been coming from a Big Occasion, he was wearing his frock-coat—and he took out a packet of bull's-eyes. It was Mr. Emmanuel, her father's friend, whose backdoor faced their backdoor across the entry that separated Magnolia Street from Oleander Street. "Suck one of these, Elsie," he said, "it will do you good." So she took one, fastening her hand round the bag, and she sucked it, and strangely enough it did her good, though the head still knocked away like anything, and the blood was still coming, for Mr. Emmanuel was mopping away. And I wonder if that was the real reason why I got so excited about Mr. Emmanuel being arrested as



the head of an international murder gang, because he gave me a bull's-eye to suck that day; so I got Willi to move heaven and earth to get him released. I don't think I've ever remembered this business of the bicycle and the bull's-eye till now, so Himmler has been lying in wait, and at last he's brought it off, he's winged Willi in his aeroplane, and Willi is lying under that blanket in the nursing home where smart ladies who hadn't been smart enough had babies they didn't want taken away from them. It's not Aubrey Street, of course it isn't, it's too broad. Lots of room. No Goldberg children playing piggy-and-stick on pavements, no Mrs. Nemtsov plucking a fowl on her doorstep. What's that street name over the door there? Ulica Leszno. If anything the tone of it is rather like the better part of Begley Hill Road, though of course the buildings are much bigger, apartment houses rather than one-family dwellings. A great many of them seem deserted. Next to no traffic—a long low peasant cart a street or two away, pulled by a very scraggy nag, what on earth is it doing in this locked-up city? There is also a tram, with a plaque above its roof, and a five-pointed star on the plaque, the Jew sign. There are a couple of those man-pushed rickshas around. That's all.

There were two rather elderly men crossing the street some fifty yards away. They were Jewish, of course, like the tram. They, too, wore the Jew sign, the five-pointed star, in blue on a white armlet on the right sleeve; the Jew sign, once quite familiar in Germany back in nineteen hundred and thirty-three, and thirty-four, and thirty-five. They had passed out of the picture during succeeding years. Yes, of course, they had been moved out into Poland, to Warsaw, and points further east.

The overcoats of those men looked quite decent. The streets were quite roomy. What? What? It was as if somebody were grumbling, grumbling in her ear:

*Help! The Jews in the Ghetto of Warsaw call out for help to all the world! They are out to murder——*

"The Devil take it!" she muttered to herself angrily. She tore her arm away from Wolff's arm. "These Jews! What a fuss they make about things!"

There was a basement-shop on her right. Quite exciting. Pickles, vinegar, a bottle of tomato ketchup! What are they complaining of?

The two men crossing the street had reached the pavement. There was a discussion going on. One turned, this was the taller. He had a white straggly beard, but he was not tall like Mr. Emmanuel, and he would not have reminded her of the old man, if the smaller man, with his back still turned towards her, had not moved his shoulders and thrust out his hands in a manner that at once put her father into her mind. That was the way she had seen those two, times without number, at the corner of Magnolia Street,



on the steps of the synagogue—arguing from a horse his back legs, as Mr. Emmanuel would put it, their arms winnowing the air . . .

Hello! They had something fastened on their sleeves. What was it? The white arm-band with the blue star, the Jew stigma . . . branded like a pariah, a leper . . .

It was like a clot of filth sent hurtling through the air. It was like a slap in the face. Her heart rocked with anger. The pulses thudded in her veins. How dare they so seek to degrade those two old men, those kind and chivalrous men, salt of the earth? She heard the breath snorting in her nostrils. She turned fiercely on the man who was conducting her.

"What is the matter with you, *gnädige Frau*?" the man asked. "For God's sake, calm yourself! You'll draw attention to us!"

She shook her head from side to side, as if to expel the broken pieces of anger.

"Sorry," she muttered. "I thought . . . I had an idea . . ." The words petered out.

"Thank God," said Wolff. "Here is our house. Up these stairs, please. Steady now."

## II

The apartment was on the first-floor landing. There was a heavy wooden knocker on the door, hand-made. Wolff knocked twice, then twice again.

"So that she knows it's me," he explained. "People are nervous." Then he took out a key and opened the door.

"Come in!" He made way for her, and closed the door behind her. Her nerves were good. She felt extremely shaky, but she was still capable of registering what a man's women were like. "Saba!" he called down the passage. "It's me! Hugo! Here we are!"

The door at the further end of the passage opened. A woman stood in the doorway, with a large pale face, a well-combed head of dark tawny hair, a loose sort of hanging wrap, classical in design, which fell voluminously round her feet. The eyes were brilliant against the pallor of the face. The lips, without make-up, were a vivid red. She presented a sight that might not have surprised you, in ordinary times, in a chaise longue in a small garden studio off the Boulevard Arago, or knocking up a dish of rice and mussels for her latest lover in a Fitzroy Square flat. She was a strange sight in the Warsaw Ghetto in April, nineteen hundred and forty-three; but there had been stranger.

"Oh, Hugo," she complained petulantly. "How long you've been!" They came nearer along the uncarpeted floor. "And this is the lady? How



do you do?" She advanced and held out her hand, like a grande dame of the studios. The wrap fell away from the outstretched arm. The skin there was so fine as to be almost translucent.

"This is my wife, Saba," Wolff explained. He gave the personal, not the family, name, probably because in the world they were involved in it is not the habit to utter a syllable more than is necessary.

"How are you, *gnädige Frau*?" murmured Elsie. "I'm sure it's very kind . . ."

"Come in, come straight in!" Frau Wolff said hospitably. She put her arm through Elsie's, and patted her hand. Wolff went forward and opened the first door on the right hand. "Any friend of my husband is very welcome. This is the salon. Won't you sit down?"

The noises were still going on in Elsie's head. Nothing hung together. She could hardly be described as a friend of the lady's husband, could she? And this was the salon, was it? Rather a good name for the room, of course, but doubtless the lady in other days had had a room, and more than one room, which could be described so. Here, too, as in the passage, there was no carpet . . . just a few strips of a ragged sort of matting, bound clumsily at the edges. There was a large table against one wall, so heavy it looked like a built-in part of the house. There was a sofa with several easy chairs equally massive, with broken springs, very dingy. On the wall over against the table there was an enormous gilt-framed picture, on the same scale as the other pieces. It was a landscape with cows and a river, doubtless a "fine" picture eighty years ago. But it was not the cows nor the river that the eyes caught sight of first, it was a big gash in the centre of the canvas, made some time by a hatchet, surely. In the same moment the mind registered the gashes in the upholstery, the lumps taken out of the table-legs, the damage to the tiles in the big cold ornamental oven. Somebody's been around, the mind said dreamily, with hatchets and things. The S.S. boys, the Hitlerjugend; one had heard vague stories of the boys out on the spree; one had even heard savage howling, far off, down the Kleiststrasse, in the old days.

Frau Wolff pointed to one of the easy chairs.

"Do sit down, Frau . . . er . . . Frau . . ." She hesitated, and looked towards her husband.

"Oh, this is Frau . . ." he started, "or is it Fraülein . . .?" He looked towards Elsie to help him out. He seemed embarrassed. He probably had looked at the name in the papers he had provided for the lady who was the friend of Herr Straupitz-Kalmin; but it had slipped his mind during the hours that had passed since then.

"I'm terribly sorry," muttered Elsie, and felt herself blushing to the rims of her ears. It was exactly like being stark naked, and a window-cleaner



comes up on his ladder, and sees you there. She was even more naked than that, with not even a name to cover her nakedness. The name she was to bear for the next day or two—please God not longer than that!—was in the envelope the big red-haired man had brought in last night to that dreadful room outside the Wall. She reached out her right hand towards her handbag; but she reached into vacancy. She had no handbag. It was not hanging over her left wrist, as, vaguely, she had expected it to be. If the man had not taken it from her in the sewer, it must have slipped from her wrist. Literally now, quite literally, she had nothing in the world but the clothes on her back. Not a powder-puff, not a nail-file, not a handkerchief, not a match-box, nothing, nothing.

But it was all right, really. It was only for a few hours. Oskar would soon see to all that. But the important thing was . . . those identity papers. Then suddenly she remembered. She had stuffed them inside her frock. Oh yes, here was the envelope. She had a name, after all. She existed. Tears pricked her eyelids.

"Here," she breathed. There was no point in making any bones about it. Probably his real name wasn't Wolff, and his wife's name wasn't Saba. She took out the *Kennkarte*. There were a great many details, who her father was, her mother, when she had been born, her profession, her status, her race, her religion. Her name, she was interested to learn, was Altmann, Lydia. She came from Cassel, she had been a dressmaker, and she was unmarried.

She looked up.

"Fraülein Altmann," she supplied. She revolved with her right-hand finger-tips the wedding-ring on her wedding finger. Ought she to send that after the handbag? There was probably no necessity to be as consistent as all that. Poor old Willi! He had spent such a lot of time acquiring for her so many jewels, and such marvellous ones. And now—just one jewel was left, her sweet little wedding-ring, out of the whole treasure-ship.

"Do sit down, Fraülein Altmann," Frau Wolff repeated, "won't you?"

"Thank you awfully," Elsie murmured. "I'm so glad to sit down. I'm a little . . . a little tired." She had been doing some very heavy sleeping lately. But it did not prevent her feeling tired to death.

"We have some coffee," Frau Wolff announced triumphantly. "Would you like some coffee, Fraülein? And what about you, Hugo?"

"No, *mein Schatz*," said Wolff. "I mustn't stay. I'm expecting some . . ." Then he came out with it. It was obvious that Fraülein Altmann would not compromise him. "Some flour."

"In a sack?" cried his wife, clapping her hands. "In a sack?"

"Of course not. You know quite well it's all paper bags nowadays. But I promised you a sack, and you shall have one."



"Oh, you darling!" she cried, "you darling!" She went up to him and kissed him. She was like a child excited about a bag of sweets. She turned again to Elsie. "You can have a tablet of . . . *you know what*"—she lowered her voice—"to put in your coffee."

I suppose she means saccharine, Elsie thought. There's probably a fierce black market in saccharine. I don't want coffee with saccharine. I don't want coffee with anything. She suddenly was conscious that there was only one thing in all the world she wanted—more than she had ever wanted anything. The smell of herself rose sickeningly into her nostrils. The stickiness was all over, chiefly in the arm-pits and between the fingers.

"I don't suppose I could possibly have a bath?" she asked faintly. She knew it must be a great deal to ask. But Oskar would make it up to them. Of course he would.

There was a silence so prolonged that at last it broke through to her, across her discomfort and wretchedness. It was obviously a request that caused the utmost inconvenience.

"I'm so sorry," Frau Wolff began. She saw the woman look for guidance into her husband's eyes, then look away again.

"We have a very fine bath indeed," said Frau Wolff. "You can see for yourself. Would you like to come and see it now?" she asked eagerly. She apparently felt that the intrinsic grandeur of the receptacle might make up for the difficulty of using it.

"The Fraülein's tired," said Herr Wolff. "Let her rest. Let her have that coffee first. The fact is, Fraülein," he explained, "I'm sure you'll understand . . ."

"But, please, of course——"

"We *have* gas," he continued. "Oh yes, there's still gas laid on." That seemed a really notable concession. "But the point is there's practically no pressure. It takes twenty minutes to boil a small tin kettle. There's a geyser in the bathroom. That's tin, too. That's why they've not taken it away. By the time you have an inch of warm water in the bottom of the bath, it's cold again. You see?"

"It won't matter at all if it's cold," breathed Elsie. "If you don't mind."

Herr Wolff turned away from her.

"See the Fraülein has her bath, Saba," he demanded. "I must be off now. *Auf wiedersehen*." He turned to Elsie again. "My wife will look after you. And you understand, it will be better if you do not move out of the place. Do not go near the windows, please. If there is an alarm, there is a false cupboard. My wife will show it you. Good day." He went up to his wife and kissed her. Then he left.

"Poor Hugo!" his wife said. "He has a great deal on his mind."

"He's very kind. You are both very kind," Elsie murmured.



"We are decent people," pointed out Frau Wolff, "people of substance, from Hamburg. Not like some of the riff-raff here, these *Ostjuden*, these Eastern Jews."

"Yes, of course," Elsie agreed. She didn't quite know where she came in. True she was the wife, the widow rather, of a German General; she was an attested Aryan, at that. On the other hand, her father had been as *Ostjudisch* as they make them, a Ukrainian Jew from the Dnieper. Very complicated.

"May I sit down?" asked Frau Wolff, and brought up a low embroidered stool to Elsie's chair. Such pleasant manners. You might have thought it was Elsie's apartment, not hers. "And perhaps you won't mind if I bring my embroidery out, and we can have a nice little talk?"

"Not at all," Elsie murmured.

Frau Wolff went behind the sofa and came back with a sort of hand-made frame, with a length of coarse material stretched across it. She brought a tin basin with her, too, with needles and a tangle of coloured threads.

"Pretty, isn't it?" Frau Wolff asked. She held up the frame for Elsie's admiration. She was working on an agreeable design of red tulips and blue-black leaves. "I made this one, too." She was pointing to the embroidered stool; the material was coarse, the colours faint, but here, too, the design was agreeable. "I did it all by myself. It helps to pass the time, you know." She sat down.

"Yes, of course." Elsie was not interested. She was interested in a bath, however cold it was. But it was wise to show a little curiosity. "The materials," she ventured. "I should have thought it would be a little difficult——"

Frau Wolff put her finger to the side of her nose, and burst into a silvery peal of laughter. It sounded quite uncanny, in that large glum uncarpeted room, with the hacked lumps of furniture up and down.

"It's astonishing what you can do with a little ingenuity," Frau Wolff confided. "It's just flour-sacks washed out, then washed out again. I make myself an absolute pest to my poor dear husband. I do, really."

Elsie smiled. That is to say her lips parted, and her teeth showed.

"And then I take another sack to threads, then I have my embroidery-wools, see? Ha! Ha!"

"Ha! Ha!" Elsie echoed.

"Then it's just a matter of dyeing the threads, to get a bit of colour into the design. It's wonderful what you can do with a bit of ink; there's never been any shortage of ink, you know——"

"No?"

"No. Blue ink, green ink, red ink . . . And for other colours you can



always soak a nice bright bit of old rag till the colours run. You just soak the threads in the dye and use it again. Pretty design, isn't it?" She moved her rump along the stool and let Elsie see the pattern of daisies and looped circles.

"Very pretty."

I'm not drunk, of course, Elsie told herself, and I'm not dreaming. But is she actually saying these things, or is it just the noises in my ear? She's a new one on me—the Jewish-German *Hausfrau*, but awfully artistic. In a walled Ghetto, with armed guards at the gates! It doesn't make sense somehow. I can't get the hang of it. Is she going to turn on that bath, or isn't she?

"Do you do any embroidery yourself, if I might ask?" Frau Wolff wanted to know.

"As a matter of fact, I don't."

"But you're artistic, I can see that in your face." If Frau Wolff had had a fan in her hand, she would have tapped her guest with it. "Do you sing?"

"I used to sing a little."

"There, what did I tell you? I used to sing myself in Hamburg, when was a girl! Do you know Hamburg?"

"Not very well."

"You know Berlin then?"

"Better."

There was a pause. The lady was obviously very curious about her guest. Short of firing a question at her point-blank, there didn't seem much chance for the present of satisfying her curiosity.

"We've been here from quite early on," Frau Wolff pointed out, as if here too, in the Warsaw Ghetto, there were old-established families, people who had come over with the Conquerer, so to speak . . . and parvenus. "We used to get up cabarets, you know, cafés chantants, if you know what I mean."

"Yes." Elsie felt a slight tickling at the back of her neck, as if an insect were brushing it with his wings.

"I used to sing Hugo Wolf *Lieder*," Frau Wolff recalled. "No relation," she confessed. "One f."

"No." The insect had flown on.

"But most of the nice people have gone east."

"A pity," Elsie breathed.

"I think they're going to let the rest of us stay now, don't you? They want us here. We're so useful, aren't we?"

"Yes. I suppose so."

"Have you been here any length of time, may I ask?"

"Not long, really. Didn't your husband tell you?"

"He doesn't often discuss his business matters with me. He just told me an important friend of his wanted us to look after you for a few days." She looked up slyly. "A German, might he be?"

Elsie was silent. Frau Wolff wasn't really playing the game. Was she ever going to do anything about that bath? Did she dare suggest drawing it herself?

"They're such *liars*," Frau Wolff suddenly exploded. "You know what Jews are!" She might herself have been an Andalusian Catholic. "You can't believe a word they say!"

"Yes, we do tend to exaggerate a little." Elsie got herself mentally to repeat her sentence. "Yes, we do tend to exaggerate a little." *We*. She wondered when last she had thought of herself corporately, a Jew among Jews. She wondered if she had ever done it in all her life before.

"All that nonsense about Treblinka, for instance. Have you heard?"

"No."

"You must have heard. Where have you been all this time?"

Elsie said nothing.

"A lot of old wives' tales! They should be ashamed of themselves. Those gas-chambers! Ridiculous!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Those gas-chambers. You've heard?"

"Oh no!" Elsie's heart knocked uneasily. "I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Of course you do!"

Elsie gestured with her hand.

"Very well, then!"

"You don't really?"

"I said I don't!" She was getting rather annoyed.

Frau Wolff moved her stool nearer to Elsie's chair.

"Then you must just have got in from outside. Fraülein Altmann, what on earth did you do that for?" For a moment Frau Wolff was full of genuine solicitude.

"Frau Wolff, I am really too tired to answer questions."

A flash of suspicion ran across Frau Wolff's mind.

"You've not been planted here to keep watch on us?"

Oh, it would be too much to bear, Elsie thought, on top of everything else, if this woman developed suspicion-mania.

"Please, please!" she begged. That tone, those eyes, had been too much for stronger wits than Frau Wolff's.

"I beg your pardon." Frau Wolff was really contrite. "You've really heard nothing outside there?"



Elsie said neither yes nor no. She was not conceding she came from outside. She was conceding nothing.

Frau Wolff took the silence to mean no.

"That's exactly what I say!" she concluded triumphantly. "They don't know a thing about it outside. That's what proves what utter nonsense it is!"

"Then perhaps it's better to pay no attention to it," hazarded Elsie.

"It just shows what people *will* say!" Frau Wolff moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue. "Brrr-r!" She shivered. "The nonsense they talk! You know what they say? They think they're just going to have a bath after the Journey, and then they're driven into the motor-vans. They're air-tight, they say, with metal doors. You can see the tubes under the floor-boards, which bring the gas in from the engines outside." The woman was gloating over the exactness of her picture. She was hugging the details to her bosom. Her eyes were shining like an animal's in a dark field. She was, of course, quite crazy. "Before they shovel them into their graves, they knock out their gold teeth, they lop the fingers off for their rings, they search everywhere, *you know where*, for any jewels they might have hidden away." She drew her wrap tighter round herself. "That's the sort of story they tell you. Would you believe it? They ought to be shot for carrying around such tales. Don't you think so?" She did not wait for a reply. She searched in her mind for a moment or two. "That was at Chmelno, they said. Yes, Chmelno. But Treblinka's the place. You know about Treblinka, of course?"

"No, I would really appreciate it if——"

"It was Chaim who first told me about Treblinka. Have you met Chaim yet? Of course not. I was forgetting. You've only just got here. You'll meet him sooner or later, down there, if you start moving around." She pointed straight down, below the floor, below the house. It gave you a queer sense of the whole place being riddled with subterranean rooms and passages, like a warren, like old-time catacombs.

"He's mad, you know," continued Frau Wolff, "stark staring mad. Otherwise he wouldn't come back here, after what he's been through. After what he *says* he's been through." She laughed uneasily. "Treblinka, that is to say. He got back through the sewers one night. He's come back for his girl—Tavele, he calls her. Everybody'll tell you about Chaim and Tavele. He says he's come back because he's not going to let Tavele go through what he went through at Treblinka. He says he'd rather kill her with his own hands first. So he's going through all the cellars and hide-outs looking for Tavele. She isn't there, of course. She isn't anywhere. She must have gone on the Journey ages ago. Or perhaps she just died in the street and they shovelled her out of the way. How can anyone tell? But he's convinced he's going



to find her somewhere, some day, and when he finds her he'll take her out of the Ghetto and go to America with her. He's got a married sister in Philadelphia."

Elsie's lips closed grimly. *So simple.* He'll go to America. He's got a married sister in Philadelphia.

"So he spends his time talking about Treblinka. I wish a bomb would fall on him!" proclaimed Frau Wolff passionately. "Then he wouldn't go about frightening people with these terrible, terrible stories!"

Elsie shut her eyes, and leaned her head back against the stuffing of the chair. She knew she had no strength to resist the creature's eldritch loquacity. If she could pull herself together, search out the famous bathroom, and lock the door while the water trickled from the geyser—she knew the woman would still talk, talk, through the keyhole if necessary, talk, talk, till she had delivered her bosom of its hideous burden.

So the woman told her the Treblinka tale; the tale that she, Saba Wolff, did not for one moment herself believe; was she not the wife of Hugo Wolff, of Hamburg, who had supplied fine pastry to all the best cafés and restaurants? Had she not entertained the best artistic society of Hamburg, which included hardly as many Jews as you could count on one hand? These ridiculous stories . . . People who spread them deserved all they got . . . Much as she deplored the activities of these tale-tellers, she had collated their narratives and was very circumstantial in her accounts of them.

There are two death-chambers at right angles to each other. They are brick buildings with several chambers and a steam-room. The steam is led from the steam-room through pipes which pass through holes into the death chambers. The death-chambers are crammed tight with naked men, women and children. There are muffled sounds to be heard for the first few minutes; then, in ten minutes, fifteen, there is silence. Then the outside ones get to work, the scavengers, the grave-diggers. A chute opens in the wall of the death-chamber; but the bodies can't be separated, for the steam has made one solid mass of them, stuck together by their own sweat. A hose-pipe of cold water is played on the bodies; they separate, and can then be shovelled down the chutes for the waiting grave-diggers to pile them up on the scoops. He was one of these, this Chaim . . . they should have cut his tongue from the roots before he came back with stories like these. Each grave-digger ties two corpses to his belt and runs to the ditches with them, dragging them along the ground. Then he runs back for two more corpses. You can hear the rattle of the grave-digging machines all the time, digging, digging. The faces of the dead, Chaim says, are bright purple, like pomegranates. And when they are the other way up—

The sentence was checked upon the writhing lips.

"Be quiet!" screamed Elsie Silver. "Be quiet! How dare you tell me



such wicked lies! I won't stay here a moment longer!" She seized the woman by the shoulders and shook her as you might a child in hysterics.

"And when they are the other way up——" Frau Wolff repeated. "And when they are the other way up——" It was like a gramophone record that has been damaged, so that the needle evokes just one phrase, again and yet again.

"I won't stay here a moment longer, I tell you! I'll tell my friend what you've been saying——"

Then the phrase died on Frau Wolff's lips. She flung herself at Elsie's feet, and grovelled like an animal. She was sobbing, sobbing, her cries making a hollow noise like a hammer beating on an empty chest.

"I'm so frightened!" the woman moaned. Her arms rippled and wound and unwound around Elsie Silver's knees. "Don't be cruel to me! I'm so frightened!"

"Come now, courage!" demanded Elsie. "There now!" She unwound the arms from around her knees, and set the woman in the chair where she herself had been sitting. The woman sat back, pale as a corpse, the eyelids fluttering faintly. "I'll get you a glass of water, shall I? At all events the water supply's normal, isn't it? I'll find the kitchen, don't worry, Frau Wolff. And the bathroom, too, for that matter."

She found the kitchen and brought in a glass of water.

"Take some. There's a good woman. That's fine. Do you feel all right now? Try and relax a bit. Forget everything. Your husband will be back soon, won't he? There! There!" She smoothed the woman's eyelids down, as deftly as she had ever smoothed Oskar's. At last the woman seemed asleep, and Elsie crept off into the passage again.

A good thing the creature conked out, Elsie told herself, or I'd have hit her on the head with a chair. She's stark staring mad, of course. I suppose they're all a bit touched in this place. How can they help it, torn up by the roots, starved, chivvied about from pillar to post?

Well, thank the Lord, I've only got two or three days of it at the most. I wonder when Beautiful will get into touch with me? A nice little hamper of tuck would do Elsie no harm, no harm at all.

Oh, here the bathroom is! There's the geyser, the aluminium-painted battleship boiler! How on earth does the thing work? When did I last see a thing of this sort? Believe it or not, Elsie Silver, it must have been Oleander Street. All roads today lead back to Oleander Street. Do you remember those people who came to live next door . . . what was their name? Nebuchadnezzar? Tuchuerderber?

(Anything, anything in the world to prevent the mind running back to the bodies stuck together, the rattle of the grave-digging machine, the dead faces bright purple, like pomegranates.)



Oh, this thing slides out, of course. These are gas-jets. Matches! Matches! She looked around for matches. There were no matches in the bathroom. There'll be matches in the kitchen. She went over into the kitchen, and found herself standing full and palpable before a window. . . .

You fool. You're underground. Herr Wolff said you mustn't let anyone see you. She was much more careful as she went hunting round for matches.

Oh, to hell with the geyser. I'll have the bath cold! There's no pressure in the gas, anyway. I'll strip down and sponge myself with cold water. She returned to the bathroom and turned on the cold water. There was a threadbare towel over a kitchen chair and a lump of soap, which was a lot more like a gritty pebble than soap.

It was while she stood there, shivering, sluicing her body, that a knock came at the door of the apartment. It was not Herr Wolff's knock, and it was not followed by the opening of the door. The knock was repeated twice, and a third time, and a fourth.

"I wonder who the deuce it is?" Elsie asked herself. "Surely that must have wakened her! Oh, don't be stupid, Elsie! She won't open the door in any case. It's not a knock she knows."

The knocking was repeated, again and yet again, more and more loudly.

I wonder who it is? I hope everything's all right. I wonder if it's got anything to do with Oskar? I wonder. A box of chocolates from the old lad, maybe. Shall I slip something on and open it myself? Better not!

"Frau Wolff!" she called out. "The door!" She used the English words. Then she stopped. If she mustn't be seen, she mustn't be heard either, least of all talking English. The knocking was not repeated. She went on dourly with her cold, comfortless bath.

## CHAPTER NINE

IN the office of the leather factory Tania sat bolt upright. Her eyes were shut, and she was asleep. She knew how to be asleep for a few minutes, or if possible for a few hours, and how to be instantly awake at a sound or a touch.

There was a touch on her shoulder.

"Yes, comrade," she said. She knew it was Mickal the foreman, and that it was Berel's factory on Niska Street. She was aware that the workers had been leaving the place for the last ten or fifteen minutes.

"We'd better be going," said Mickal, "before curfew. It's not far."

She rose silently and went after him. It was dusk. There was quite a lot



of movement in the streets with bands of workers returning under guard to their houses and barracks. They went into a house one turning and only two or three blocks away. Once again there was a cunningly concealed door in a basement, a descent to a cellar, passages, more doors, a buttressed cellar at the end of it all.

"You've been hard at it," said Tania. A rat scurried by her feet. It did not perturb her.

"For two years," said Mickal. "We've worked harder since January. We've known we could do it when the time came."

"The time has come," said Tania. "It came a long time ago."

"I was young once," thought Mickal, "and alive once. If I were still young and alive, I'd sit down in the damp here, and put her over my knees, and smack her buttocks. Or I'd take her in my arms and kiss her. But she'd consider that very unorthodox, I think."

"Any day now," said Mickal aloud.

There were footsteps coming towards them.

"Who?" called Mickal.

"Who?" cried voices beyond.

"November," they all said, and gave numbers. They were all at ease.

They met outside a door, and knocked. The knock was satisfactory, and the door was opened from within. Mickal entered first, then Tania. Two men in dungarees came in behind them.

The room was almost dry, hardly at all like a coal-cellar; the largest patch of damp on the wall facing the door was covered by a large, painstakingly precise map of the Ghetto, drawn up, you felt, by some well-trained borough surveyor. There were subsidiary maps of underground communications. The maps were tacked on so loosely they could be torn down and destroyed within a second or two of an alarm. There was a large desk, constructed neatly from planks and boxes. A man sat behind the desk. Half a dozen other men stood around. An electric bulb hung from the brick ceiling, a genuine bulb hanging from a genuine flex. Someone had crawled along a sewer and tapped the cables feeding some Nazi offices.

The man at the desk rose from his chair. He had himself constructed both desk and chair. The charts had been drawn up by the chief surveyor of the township of Hanover. They had lost sight of him. It was not known if he had cracked up and fallen dead in a gutter, or been press-ganged and sent on the Journey. The sewer-crawler had once been the Professor of Electrodynamics at Vienna.

"You are Raven?" said the man at the desk. "Welcome, comrade."

"You are Berel?" said Tania. "Greetings, comrade."

They both raised the clenched fist. Of the other men in the cellar, and he other newcomers, some raised the fist, some did not. It was as if they



had entered a world where gestures were less interesting than they had been.

The man Berel was young, scarcely forty. He was small, well-proportioned, with a neatly trimmed moustache, well-shaved. He was neat all over, with neatly parted hair, a neat tie and collar, a neat town suit. The suit was worn to airmail-paper thinness, but preserved as if it were a museum piece. The creases in the trousers were notable. He was one of those communists who believe communism to be a political theory rather than a sartorial technique. He waved a well-cared-for hand towards the neat low contraption which was a settee for his visitors by day and his own couch by night.

"Make yourself comfortable, comrade," he bade.

"I can stand," Tania said.

He smiled, and sat down again.

"This is Raven," he said to the others there. "Some of you heard one of her comrades talking about her." They nodded, but did not speak. It was as if they could hardly believe that anyone had come to join them from the outside world merely to be of use to them, that it was impossible they should have no ulterior idea. The Polish Gentiles were helping them, not because the Ghetto-dwellers were starved and doomed creatures, but for the sake of an idea called Poland. And they seemed to think it was the same with these communist emissaries from the Soviets, whose help had been slower in coming. They had an idea, which some called communism and others Russia; some had come to think them the same thing, some still saw the distinction between them. But it was to advance their own idea (some thought), rather than to help the animals in their cage, that these Russian agents had covered large distances.

"The comrade talked well about this Raven," Berel pointed out. That was quite a lot of praise as between communist and communist. In these strained conditions there seemed a regrettable tendency to let custom go by the board.

"Then Blum is here?" Tania asked quickly. "And what about the other two? I want to see them."

"They're at their jobs," said Berel shortly. "But no-one called Blum has arrived yet."

"Blum went to Moscow, and should be here by now. If he's not here, the two others are under my orders."

"You're under mine," Berel said drily.

"I have orders to transmit," she stated.

"We've received them, Raven."

"Of course." For a moment she was unsure of her ground. By radio, he must mean.



"Then why aren't you fighting?" she wanted to know.

"There was fighting in January," he told her. "It was too soon. Remember this also: there are others besides us communists in this place."

"That's what I've been sent to say: Fight. If you don't fight, no-one else will."

"The comrade is young," a voice maintained, a hueless voice out of the mass of men. But it was Mickal's voice. She could have stuck a knife into him where he stood.

"What has age or youth to do with it?" She turned on him, her cheeks flaming.

Berel was of the view there were other things to do with energy than to dissipate it in words.

"It is intended that fighting will begin a week from now," he pointed out, "and it may be sooner. It's most unlikely that anyone fighting will come through. That's clear, comrade?"

"But of course." Her lip was contemptuous. "That's the whole point isn't it, comrade? That's the point I was to make. You can either die shivering, or die fighting."

"The point has already been made," someone said testily. Raven was not creating a good impression.

"That has nothing to do with me," she insisted. "I was asked to make it."

"Good," said Berel. "It's on record. We had to be satisfied that we had enough fighters and enough weapons to make the rising a . . . a business proposition."

"It's not numbers that count—or mass of material." She was implacable.

"Agreed. The trained men are between four hundred and four hundred and fifty. They are Bundists; for the most part, Social Democrats. The comrade will understand there is a United Front in being. Four hundred and fifty. Not excessive against an enemy of thousands—hundreds of thousands."

"No." She was mollified. The disparity between Jews and Germans made up to some extent for the disparity between Social Democrats and communists.

"Within a day or two we should attract a thousand or two more," said Berel. "The Boy's writ runs far."

She did not get the reference.

"A thousand or two more? Like those stalks of straw I saw in the leather factory?" she asked bitterly.

"It would be useful if the comrade were a little more patient," Berel reproved her. His voice was icy.

"There are arms stored in the dumps for at least twice as many—some

two thousand rifles, several score M.6.34s, some seven or eight hundred tommy-guns. The stock of grenades is excellent. There cannot be too many, of course."

That touched her on a sensitive spot.

"I've been told I turn out a good grenade. Perhaps, if the comrade would permit, there's a trick or two I could show one or two of the comrades." The small schoolgirl came a trifle wistfully into the tough woman's throat.

"That may be required later. I would like the comrade to get an idea of the underground communications, Mickal." He pointed with his ruler to one of the maps above his desk. "Then you will give some practical instruction in the methods of getting from block to block without emerging above ground."

"Your reports, comrades," Berel requested. The well-kept fingers drummed delicately on the papers before him.

## CHAPTER TEN

### I

ON the morning after the arrival of Elsie Silver in the Warsaw Ghetto there was another arrival in Warsaw, which must be noted at this point.

This was a letter from the Reichsführer S.S. Heinrich Himmler, addressed to his Excellency S.S. Obergruppenführer Wilhelm von Brockenburg. The letter was full of solicitude.

*My dear Willi [it ran],*

*This is just a line to confirm my Adjutant's telephone conversation with your good Metzler.*

*This accident should never have happened to you. I was shocked; though, indeed, I was overjoyed to hear you are so much better by now. As I had my Adjutant tell yours, I shall be coming especially to Warsaw to reassure myself of your progress. I hope to arrive tomorrow; if not, the day after, probably during the morning. I am tearing away old Sauerbruch from his duties and bringing him along. He simply must make you stand on your feet again in time for our beloved Führer's birthday next Tuesday, which we will celebrate together, I hope.*

*Looking forward so much to seeing you,  
Heil Hitler!*

*Yours as ever,  
Heinrich Himmler.*

E\*



This letter was an enclosure in a larger envelope, marked with the very secret seal of the most highly confidential correspondence. The larger envelope was addressed to S.S. Gruppenführer Kurt Hinze, S.S. Officer in Command, Warsaw Area. It contained a note from an assistant of Himmler, Hans Hornbostel by name, S.S. Oberscharführer. The note addressed instructions to Gruppenführer Hinze, under three headings:

*1. I am ordered by the Herr Reichsführer S.S. to hand you the enclosed letter addressed to Herr S.S. Obergruppenführer Wilhelm von Brockenburg. You will peruse it, seal it, and despatch it by special messenger to the addressee.*

*2. Your messenger will endeavour to penetrate, but without violence, to the addressee personally, so as to ascertain*

*a. his state of health*

*b. his reaction and/or that of his entourage*

*c. identity of above, also numbers and/or visible means of defence of their present abode.*

*You will report back immediately.*

*3. The Herr Reichsführer will take the opportunity provided by his visit to Warsaw to investigate the fact, revealed by Production Control, Occupied Territories, Breakdown of Statistical Report for March, nineteen hundred and forty-three (of which I enclose copy for your perusal), that whilst the Warsaw Ghetto population in the six months period just concluded was fairly stable at about forty thousand, the volume of war industrial production issuing from the Ghetto factories has decreased by twenty-eight per cent in bulk, and even by as much as thirty-seven per cent in Reichsmark value.*

*You are requested to consult with H.Q. Gestapo, Warsaw Area, and furnish forthwith a complete and fully documented explanation. Some disappointment is felt that the forty thousand figure had not been considerably reduced.*

*Heil Hitler!*

The two notes were duly delivered. The one addressed to Brockenburg was not read by the General himself, the one addressed to Hinze, S.S. Officer in Command, Warsaw Area, was. He at once got in touch with H.Q. Gestapo, facing his own H.Q. on Aleja Szucha. God damn it, he was a soldier, not a damned invoice clerk! Thereafter the telephones were busy.

"Hello? Is that Gestapo House, Ghetto? Heil Hitler! This is Warsaw District, C.O.'s office speaking. Put me through to C.O. Ghetto, will you? My C.O. wants him. Thanks!"

"Hello? Is that Herr Müller? Heil Hitler! I'm connecting you with Herr Witzleben. You're through, sir!"

"Hello! Is that you Müller? Heil Hitler! Yes, this is Witzleben! How's life? Fine! I'm so glad." Those two were obviously on the best



of terms. "He's remembered we're alive. No, not *him*! But it's bad enough! Yes, *him*! He's coming to Warsaw tomorrow. He'll be here in the morning. Oh, about eleven. Yes, it's this . . . you know what . . . business. He's going to pay him a visit, handkerchief and all, with old Sauerbruch. Just a pair of devoted schoolboy friends. But that's not all. Oh no. He's going to take the opportunity to go into that discrepancy we were discussing the other day. He's on to it. I won't give you the full text over the 'phone, but listen to this . . . Listening? Quote: 'that whilst the Warsaw Ghetto population in the six months period just concluded was fairly stable at about forty thousand, the volume of war industrial production issuing from the Ghetto factories has during that period decreased by twenty-eight per cent in bulk, and even by as much as . . .'. What's that? You've got it? I knew you would. He goes on (quote): 'You will be requested to furnish forthwith a complete, fully documented explanation.' Then he winds up: 'Some disappointment is felt that the forty-thousand figure has not been considerably reduced!' Yes, it *is* pretty bad. Now look here, Müller. You realize this is your job, don't you? I want you to send me round that complete fully documented explanation by midnight tonight. What? I'm joking? No, Müller, I'm not joking! You'll what? You'll come round? Oh no, you won't, Müller! I'm frantically busy with preparations, as you can well imagine. You know exactly what's wanted. We've discussed it before. It's on top of us now, that's the only difference. What? I quite see, and I'm terribly sorry. But Jew matters are *your* business. Of course, I'm responsible to the Herr Reichsführer. But you're responsible to *me*! Understand, Herr Müller? I've given you an order!"

The famous rasp had come back into the gentleman's voice. The gentleman banged down the telephone receiver. It would have been hard to deduce from that final interchange of sentences that the two officials had been the warmest of friends since their respective appointments to Warsaw.

"*Verflucht!*" said Herr Müller, Officer in Charge, Gestapo House, Leszno Street.

"*Verflucht!*" said the telephonist at the switchboard. For the banging down of a receiver makes an unpleasant noise on an operator's ear-drums when she, or he, happens to be listening in.

And in this case, here in Gestapo House, it was a he. The name was Kurt Wernicke, of Friedrichroda, in Thüringen. He had managed to listen in during most of the conversation, despite a number of interruptions occasioned by the discharge of his duty. His hands were otherwise occupied, or he would have rubbed them together appreciatively. The Big Shots were getting very careless about the sort of thing they discussed on the telephone. Everybody was getting very careless. That suited Kurt, he told himself.



Weighty matters were afoot this morning. He was a little slow-witted, and hadn't quite pieced things together yet. Then the Big Shot at the other end banged the telephone receiver down. "*Verflucht!*" said Herr Wernicke, shrugged his shoulders and reached for the block of note-paper on which he had been trying all morning to compose a letter to his wife, Emma. He had already let her know about the parcel he was sending off to her under separate cover, the three gold watches, the two silk prayer-shawls which would cut down nicely for summer frocks for the children, and one or two other items. As for the three pounds of artificial gold teeth he had sent her by private messenger, he thought the best thing for her to do was to lock them away for him to deal with next time he was on leave, or after the war was over, which would be almost any day now; for hadn't our glorious Führer promised the other day that everything would be over by Christmas?

Herr Wernicke paused a moment and sucked the stub end of his gold-mounted fountain-pen. Then he tore off that last page and destroyed it. Perhaps it wouldn't do for people to get to know about those three pounds of solid gold in the offing. They might want the loan of it. He didn't see there was any harm in advising her about the six leather handbags which would be on their way to her by the end of the week. They were first-rate goods, genuine Jewish master-artisans' work; she might keep two, and sell the others. There would be more later. Much more sensible to get the old stinkers working on handbags than on army belts. The high-ups were in on it, too. There wasn't much chance of anything coming unstuck anywhere, was there?

On reflection, he determined to keep out reference to the six leather handbags, too. There was no point in gratuitously putting things down in black and white. Perhaps there was some sort of trouble brewing, after all, over leather handbags, and dressing-cases, and sports shoes, and women's shoes, and those jolly women's belts, and all the other things the Jew-pigs had been turning out so profitably. That was clearly what the row was about between old Müller and Witzleben, and apparently it went back much higher up. It was a pity he had been prevented from giving the matter his undivided attention.

The fountain-pen got to work. That was held in the right hand. In the left hand he held a handsome garlic sausage, of the sort the Polish Jews turn out so tastily. There was even a little delicatessen outfit near the old slaughter-house, where a family of Jews had been kept back specially for the manufacture of these garlic sausages for the particular enjoyment of Gestapo personnel. He took a big bite from the sausage, then wrote: *It's pretty bloody here, darling, I can tell you that. What a job! Planted in the middle of these stinking Jew-pigs! Well, after all, for the sake of one's Führer is there any work that can be too hard or mean? How are little Heinrich's boils, darling? The little devil, whenever I think of him, a big tear—*



Then he stopped. He did not trace the connection of ideas; perhaps it was merely the name: Heinrich. He put down the pen, the lump of sausage. Then he pressed a buzzer three times with a finger of the left hand.

Out in the corridor a gaggle of Hitlerjugend youths waited around, sprawled on benches, knocking dice together, telling one another smutty stories. They were only about sixteen, most of them rather inferior specimens on the physical plane, but ideologically, doubtless, on a thoroughly satisfactory level. They were wall-eyed, knock-kneed, club-footed, one of them had the trigger-finger missing. There was no point in holding them back in Germany; they would not make good soldiers. But it was felt at Hitlerjugend Headquarters that events in Warsaw as they developed might be of the utmost value to the lads in their spiritual evolution. So they packed parcels, ran errands, took over the telephone from time to time, and wherever there was some beating up to do they could be in on it. That was a branch of education the importance of which it was easy to underestimate, and in Germany proper nowadays there were too few Jews to train on, certainly not enough. So the lads were sent around to the various Jew centres of the General Government, where they had won high marks. It was astonishing how little a blind eye or varicose veins or the lack of a trigger-finger cramps your style when it comes to tearing out an old Jew's beard, or raping a small girl, or tipping a baby through a second-floor window.

Over in the telephone room, Herr Wernicke pressed the buzzer once, twice, three times. Emil? No. Werner? No. Three times. It was for Kurt.

Kurt was dozing. He was a long gangling youth with an enormous Adam's apple. Werner gave him a shove.

"That's for you, man! Get up!"

Kurt rose and went across towards the door of the telephone room. His huge hands swung from the wrists as if the bones in the wrist were broken. He entered.

"Heil Hitler! *Ja, Herr?*" he inquired.

Herr Wernicke turned. He fumbled in his pocket for a key.

"Heil Hitler! Here, Kurt!" He handed the key over. "Atchoo!" He produced a loud sneeze. "That goddam cold's coming on again! I want you to get my aspirin and my quinine tablets out of the cupboard in my room!"

"*Freilich!*" said Kurt.

Then Herr Wernicke gave other instructions in an almost inaudible voice. "Go to X at once. Tell him *he's* arriving tomorrow. He'll know who I mean. If anyone checks up on you, say you're bringing a message from the Boss that X is to come to the office three o'clock today. Tell X he's to give you the envelope. Bring it back here at once!"



"*Ja, mein Herr! Heil Hitler!*" said Kurt, and was out of the office. It was extraordinary how quickly that lad could move. Those big boots—like dustbins, but they slid along like water-beetles. A good lad! Never any monkey-business with the envelopes, thought Herr Wernicke. Yes, yes! God damn the telephone!

## II

Industries need organization, whether legal or illegal; perhaps illegal industries require even more unusual organizing abilities, when the workers have only a phantom existence; they have no papers, no ration-cards, they have no right to the crust of bread in their hands, the clothes on their backs, even the air in their lungs.

It is clear the control organized by the Gestapo over the secret Ghetto luxury trades which yielded them such handsome profits could only be perfunctory. After all, the Gestapo had other work to do, and though they could arrange both the delivery of the raw materials and the export of the finished products, the actual manufacture, as well as the considerable clerical work involved, had to be in the hands of local experts.

Herr Leon Ashkenazi was one of these, as well as Herr Kahn, leader of the Kahn gang. It is almost an *a priori* principle that industries cannot be efficiently organized unless there are gangs and gangsters to give them a fillip when people tend to get a little complacent. In this they seem to have the respectable authority of industrial practice in many renowned cities throughout the United States of America; so that the existence of the Kahn gang, and, earlier, of the Schwarz gang, in the Warsaw Ghetto can hardly be adduced as a reproach against the Gestapo authorities. (By this time, namely April of nineteen hundred and forty-three, the Kahn gang had liquidated its rival, in the approved fashion of the classic Capone and Dillinger models.)

If the activities of the Herren Kahn and Schwarz are to be taken as a matter of course, then certainly no bitter feelings can be harboured against the Ghetto magnate, Leon Ashkenazi, or Reb Aryeh ben Aryeh, as the beadle used to describe him in happier days, when he summoned him to take his place in the synagogue pulpit. Reb Aryeh lived in Solna Street, no great distance away from Gestapo House, in fact, in a comfortable district from which nearly every other Jewish family had long been booted out. You might have said to yourself that Reb Aryeh and his family were under the direct protection of the Gestapo, and, in fact, that was quite true. Reb Aryeh's apartment, his family, even his parlour-maid, had never been urged to take the Journey eastward; they had survived the local migrations into the more squalid purlieus of the Ghetto. They even retained their grand



piano. No wandering gang of Baltic toughs or Hitlerjugend dream-boys out on the spree had defecated on their carpets or splintered their mirrors with a hammer. You might have said of their apartment it was not the Warsaw Ghetto, it was Wimbledon, or Passy.

Reb Aryeh was at table. He had a fine forehead, a well-combed black beard, and no more than the suspicion of a paunch. He wore a black silk skull-cap, an alpaca coat getting just a little bit shiny, and a fine gold watch-chain across his waistcoat, which he locked up carefully when he left the flat, and put on again when he returned; at least, if he was expecting no official visitors. There was no point in being provocative.

He was at table, and had on a pair of comfortable red carpet slippers; so perhaps the meal was rather late breakfast than early lunch. The furniture, the chandelier, the carpet, the wife, the son and daughter, were all to match, comfortable, even well-dressed.

And yet—comfortable? It is not merely the still presentable carpet nor the decent linen and plate that mean comfort. Not even the single boiled egg that had been laid solemnly, even triumphantly, before Reb Aryeh . . . a boiled egg, at that time, in that place. There was a sort of abstractedness about that room and the people in it; they were apart, in a void, like people in a projectile smoothly voyaging in a dark and howling limbo. There were guilt and terror in the eyes of that bearded man, though it is certain that, head for head, no other family had subscribed so handsomely and insistently to the community chest.

There was a knock at the door. The parlour-maid, who was pouring out the coffee, started. She could not get out of the habit of starting when there was a knock at the door, though it was quite silly; nobody who should not be knocking ever knocked at the Ashkenazi door. But the woman was beyond the usual age of parlour-maids; she was well beyond fifty. She looked very care-worn. It could be felt she was not a career parlour-maid. She had a nervous tic at the corner of one eye. After all, the Gestapo could not be expected to let the Ashkenazis retain a parlour-maid with the stamina of a Swedish gymnast or the looks of a Miss Lamarr. Her name was Ella.

The parlour-maid started, and spilled the coffee on the table-cloth.

"*Oi weh!*" moaned Madame Ashkenazi, "*Oi weh!*" and wrung her hands. She was not in complete control of herself these days.

"I'm sorry!" wailed Ella. But that, of course, made it worse. The tic in the corner of her eye fluttered like a bird's wing.

"Sorry! Sorry! A lot of good it will do being sorry!" They were always at it, those two.

"I can't say more than I'm sorry," murmured Ella, and took the corner of the plush table-cloth to mop up the coffee.



"The plush table-cloth!" screamed Madame Ashkenazi. "I can't bear it any more! I will tell the Gestapo I want a change! You will have to go up into Nalewki! Then you'll see what will happen to you!" It is no wonder there was a nervous tic in Ella's eye.

There was a louder knock at the door. Reb Aryeh was not expecting any visitors.

"It will be better if you answer the door, Ella," he pronounced. "Go!"

Ella went. She came back half a minute later. Her lower jaw hung loose. The tic was working away like a busy semaphore. She brought words out at last.

"A boy from the Hitlerjugend, he has a message for the Master."

"Well, why didn't you ask him in and put him in the chair?"

"He says . . . he must give you the message personally."

"Very well." Red Aryeh lifted his paunch from between the chair and the table. Automatically he slipped the gold watch-chain out of his waistcoat and let it slide into his trousers pocket. He went out into the passage, closing the dining-room door behind him. The boy was standing in the doorway, picking his teeth. He was tall, at least as tall as Reb Aryeh.

"Well?" asked Reb Aryeh. It was not the first time a Hitlerjugend boy, and, in fact, this particular boy, had come to him with a message. "Come in! Come in!" he said as if he were the most popular visitor his household ever had. The boy sat down in the big chair. Reb Aryeh closed the outside door.

"Give me the envelope first," said the boy. "He said half a million zlotys."

Reb Aryeh went pale.

"What are you talking about? Half a million? Where shall I get so much money? It's not true—he didn't say half a million! Get up! You can go away!"

The boy got up. He moved the toothpick from a left molar to a right molar.

"*Egal!*" he said, and shrugged his shoulders. He put his hand on the door-knob.

"Wait a minute!" said Reb Aryeh. "Wait a minute! What are you in such a hurry for? He said a quarter of a million, I tell you!"

"No!" said the boy.

"Well, three hundred and fifty thousand!"

The boy half-opened the door, then turned. The expression on his face was quite ugly.

"You'll be sorry, Jew!" he said. "It's worth a lot more!"

Reb Aryeh fanned the air with his hands.

"All right! All right! Wait!" He turned and entered the room on

the right. That was his bedroom. The safe was hidden behind clothes in an adjoining closet. He counted out one hundred notes, five thousand zlotys each. He came back to the Hitler boy.

"Count them!" He added a fierce curse in Hebrew. He was a first-rate Hebrew scholar.

The boy counted the money, and placed them in his breast-pocket. He advanced towards the door, and threw over his shoulder: "He's coming tomorrow, or the day after." Then he disappeared.

Reb Aryeh sank down into the big chair the boy had just vacated. His face was ashen-grey. There was a damp dew on his forehead. He sat there two minutes, three minutes, five. He took out his large red handkerchief and mopped his forehead again and yet again, but it remained chilly and damp as before. There had been two earlier descents upon Warsaw by S.S. Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler. The first had been followed by the establishment of the Ghetto. The second had been followed by the institution of the death-trains for the liquidation of at least fifty per cent of the Ghetto population. By now far more than fifty per cent had gone. There was no doubt what the object of this third visit was. There was no doubt at all.

"But it can't mean me," Leon Ashkenazi moaned. "Not me and my wife and my two children! Think what I've paid them!"

"It means you," Reb Aryeh responded. "It means you and your wife and your two children. You'd better make yourself ready!"

"But look how useful I've been to them! They can't get on without me!"

"In a wilderness," said Reb Aryeh, "where there's only cockroaches and rats and spiders, they can do without you."

The dining-room door opened, and the young Ashkenazi girl came down the passage. She was about fifteen and pale as alabaster. Her hair was shining black and her eyes dull jet. She slipped her hand into her father's.

"Come, daddy," she said. "You should finish that egg. Whatever there is tomorrow, there's a fresh egg today. Come, daddy," she begged.

Over in the wash-room at Gestapo House, Kurt, the Hitler boy, handed over the envelope.

"*Du Schweinhund!*" said Herr Wernicke. "You've opened the envelope!"

"It's quite all right," Kurt assured him. "You've got your two hundred and fifty thousand. Count them!"

"Give me the rest, you lump of *Dreck!*" Herr Wernicke stormed. The boy made a rude noise. He was rapidly growing up.



## III

"But you're responsible to *me*!" proclaimed Herr Witzleben, Gestapo chief of the Warsaw Area. "I say you're responsible to *me*! Understand, Herr Müller? I've given you an order!"

He rang off.

"*Verflucht!*" said Herr Müller, in charge of Gestapo House, Leszno Street, as he banged down the receiver.

Herr Müller was a large man, with the dimensions proper to a forceful exponent of the virtues of a super-race. He had been a police sergeant during the shameful days of the Weimar Republic, had personally questioned a cellarful of communist prisoners in February, nineteen hundred and thirty-three, leaving eight of them dead, and ever since had been regarded as a first-rate police expert. He had got on well in his career. He radiated honesty, good nature and prosperity. His home back in Breslau was crammed from floor to attic with admirable *objets d'art*, which proved him to be a connoisseur of no mean order.

Herr Müller was really very annoyed. He looked round the office to see if there was anything he could do about it. A Jew would have been useful at that moment. He had colossal hands and he had more than once cracked a Jew skull between his palms, like a nut, when he had cause to suspect *Frechheit*, impertinence, that most preposterous of all Jew characteristics. There was no Jew handy, only one or two subordinates, with their heads close down to their papers. They knew what their chief was like in these moods, and preferred not to meet his eye. Herr Müller placed his elbows on his desk, and cupped his chin in his saucer-like palms. He wanted to think, and that was always a rather elaborate and even a noisy process, like cranking up a car. But just as a car won't start up without petrol, so Herr Müller couldn't start thinking without brandy. And it had to be Cognac, not mere German *Brandtwein*; for he had acquired the taste for the beverage in France some two years ago, when in charge of the roving commission to root out political refugees from the French internment camps. (What a lark that was! The bribes! The wenches! The fun in the cellar with the prisoners!)

"Cognac!" yelled Herr Müller.

A subordinate rose from his desk, went to a bottle in a cupboard and filled a large tumbler to the brim.

"*Bitte, Herr Chef!*" the young man whispered, then skipped back to his chair again.

Herr Müller drank. He drained the tumbler, then himself deigned to fill the tumbler a second time. It was odd how immediately the brandy showed up in his face, like the glowing filaments of a pilot-light. It was almost as



if there were some communication, unique in Herr Müller's system, between his throat, or at least his stomach, and the network of capillaries in the skin of his face.

He belched mightily. He was now, in fact, thinking.

Witzleben, the swine! Trying to pass the buck on to *him*! That was what was wrong with this outfit, everybody was always trying to pass the buck on to someone else. As if Witzleben didn't get his rake-off, and a damned handsome one, too! As if Witzleben didn't know the exact reason for the discrepancy between the number of Jews in the Ghetto and the output of war material! And here was *that* one on top of them, to carry out an investigation. So *he* wasn't in on this, eh? It was probably the only racket he wasn't in on! A goddam nuisance! It would have cost one hell of a rake-off to keep *him* sweet, but it would have been worth it! God damn it!

A pity it was going wrong. What a set-up! Earlier on it had all been thoroughly German and orderly. There had been forty thousand Jews working in the Ghetto war factories, ranging from full-sized plants to noisome little sweating-dens that smelled like sewers, and often were sewers. The other twenty or more thousand were officially dead, but only officially, of course. They had been kept alive, if that was the word, in order to engage in black labour for the black market in luxury goods. What had the Jews to complain of? Weren't there some Jews that were actually making a fat packet out of it—the Ashkenazis and the Wildsteins, for instance? And the Kahn gang weren't feathering their nests, maybe?

But, of course, there was no doubt about it, the bulk of the profits went into the good Aryan pockets of the Gestapo and the S.S. boys. And that was the trouble. There were too many pockets, by and large. That was the reason for the present fall-off in war production; too many Jew-pigs had been siphoned off from the production of war goods to the production of black market luxury goods. "Discrepancy!" he'd said. Discrepancy my foot! Witzleben knew bloody well the reason for the discrepancy, having touched a fresh cool eighty thousand Reichsmark only last Saturday. The nerve! Trying to pass on the buck to *him*, of all people! Him, Müller, who was always ready to share his last crust with a pal!

And what was this crack about the forty thousand not being reduced? "Some disappointment is felt that the forty thousand figure has not been considerably reduced." As a matter of fact, the forty thousand *had* been reduced to make good the enormous death-rate among the ghosts, the twenty thousand shadows. Those wretched creatures sometimes dropped dead in dozens, in hundreds, like flies brought down from the roof of a flat by a squirt of creosote vapour. A sneeze, half a cough, was enough to tear them apart, like a piece of tissue-paper. So you had to keep the forty



thousand more or less constant as a sort of reservoir out of the consignments that came from out west.

Then, of course, there were also the legal Ghetto industries that you had to think of—the shoe-makers, the tailors, the brush-makers, the belt-makers, and the rest. You couldn't monkey around too much with that figure, or production would completely go to pieces. It would have been easy at any moment to organize a series of Journeys eastward. It would have been very agreeable to get rid of the scum. But you can't have it both ways. If you want goods and profits, you've got to have Jews to earn them for you.

Yet—forty thousand! There was no denying it. It was an awful lot of Jews! Herr Müller scratched his head. Far too many! The pool could have got along with thirty-five thousand, thirty thousand. The brutes were being overfed, that's what it was. They were being fed on the fat of the land!

Herr Müller swigged his cognac and belched. He had an idea. He always got an idea if he gave himself a chance. What was the present bread ration in the Ghetto? Whatever it was, it was far too much! He reached for the telephone. He would have a word with that son of a bitch—what was his name?—Straupitz-Kalmin, head of the Food Office, that strutting aristocrat, that greasy Don Juan! He would give him what for, mollycoddling these pig-Jews. He removed the mouthpiece, then put it back again. No. Not over the telephone. He would go along to see him. It was only a block away. He would invade his quarters, in the aggressive tradition of the Force.

Besides, he liked moving around Gestapo House and thrusting along the pavements of Leszno Street. He liked throwing his weight about, having the sentries snap to attention; he liked the way the Jews in the corridors tried to crush themselves against the walls, so as to escape his rolling omnipotent eye. It was as good as a tonic. He made a point of going around his premises and marching out on to the adjoining pavement two or three times a day. Nothing like showing 'em he was alive! Ha! Ha! Ha! He roared with laughter. His clerks shivered in their boots. It boded no good to anyone when Herr Müller roared with laughter all to himself.

The offices of Herr Straupitz-Kalmin were on the corner of the block. Two or three woebegone Jews were standing around the doorway, as if there was a hope the bread ration might go up a gramme or two if they stood and stared and prayed long enough. Herr Müller planted a couple of vigorous kicks in their behinds, and sent them scurrying away like scrawny chickens. He stood on no ceremony. There was a sentry or two at the door. He pushed them out of the way and thudded up into the office of the Generalinspektor. To his unbounded annoyance, Straupitz-Kalmin was not there. Only his secretary—a woman, of course—was there.



She was a pretty little bitch, God damn her, a Pole if anybody was, but doubtless she had papers making out she was *Volksdeutsch*. These Polish pieces had something to them. Herr Müller eyed the young lady angrily. There was no question about it, this Straupitz-Kalmin knew how to pick them. How well-stocked she was! And how came it that a mere nobody, a civilian, a clerk, could have a bit of goods like this on the premises, if he felt like a bit of a nibble now and again, while he, in charge of the whole shoot, had to put up with a male clerk with as much sex appeal as a turnip?

"Where the hell's he got to?" roared Herr Müller. "Why the hell's he not around when someone calls on him?"

"He's been very busy all day," said the lady. "I'm sorry, Herr Müller. If only the Herr Chef had telephoned——"

"God damn his bones! Does that fellow ever do any work, the god-dam lounge-lizard! Tell him to come and see me the moment he gets back!"

"Yes, Herr Müller!"

"Heil Hitler!"

"Heil Hitler, Herr Müller!"

Herr Müller stormed out of the room. The little bitch brought her eyes closer to the sheet she'd been working on, as if she were short-sighted. But she was not. She had excellent eyes.

"There's something up!" she said to herself. "The boss has been like a cat on hot bricks all yesterday and today! Then the Big Shot himself coming over! I'd better keep an ear cocked! It may be worth a zloty or two to yours sincerely. Oh boy!"

#### IV

A cat on hot bricks. Yes, it was a fair enough description of Oskar Straupitz-Kalmin's state of mind during the last two days. He knew the Gestapo was after Elsie already. He was convinced they were combing the place for her. He wasn't aware whether they were trailing him or not. Perhaps they were letting him ride easy for the time being, in the hope that sooner or later he would bring them to her. In the meantime the job was to collect as many of his assets as possible, of the sort that lend themselves to collection—banknotes, gold cigarette-cases, rings, wristlet-watches, American gold dollars—and stow them away in the most satisfactory of his hide-outs for the moment when he had retrieved Elsie from the Ghetto and they could make their getaway.

The getaway had better happen as soon as possible, in two days, three days at most. He didn't like the way things were shaping up at all. By the



time a week was over the fat would very probably be in the fire, sizzling to high heaven. In the meantime, she'd just have to grin and bear it, poor old Elsie. It would be frightful for her, but not so frightful as it would be if the Gestapo boys got hold of her and gave her the run-around. He shivered. They were real experts in Warsaw, on Szucha Street.

And it wouldn't be quite so bad with the Wolffs as it might be elsewhere. Wolff had been quite somebody in Hamburg, he had run a catering industry for the Baltic cities. And now he was a master-baker. The bakers were the aristocrats of the Ghetto—the bakers and the carriers. Wolff seemed to be quite a good chap. As far as Oskar could make out, Wolff wasn't in the racket for what he could get for himself, so much as for the black-market flour he could get for other people. A few extra grammes here, a few extra grammes there. Even the Polish ration didn't amount to more than two slices a day, how on earth did those wretched Jews carry on with the ration *they* got? Fantastic people, those Jews! Their inconceivable tenacity!

Anyhow, Elsie wouldn't be short of bread. She mightn't even be short of cake. But was that enough for old Elsie? Like hell it wasn't. He knew Elsie's appetite of old time.

So he made up a little parcel for her. There was a nice little Dutch cheese, some chocolates—that would get her!—some dates and figs, and a lump of that famous garlic sausage they were still turning out in the little delicatessen outfit near the old slaughter-house. He remembered how she used to dote on that sort of stuff in Berlin, in the old days. "I'm *not* going to have a baby!" she would assure him. It was the little Yiddisher girl from Doomington coming out in her. For himself the stuff was rather on the highly flavoured side. That's the worst of being born a gentleman. He smiled wryly.

How could he get the stuff across to her in the Wolff apartment—where was it now?—in Gesia Street, wasn't it? It was a pity Erna, his secretary, was such a difficult piece of goods, jealous as they make them. But life in the office had only become tolerable since he had managed to wangle Erna into the place. As Polish as they make them, but they had made out she was a sky-blue *Volksdeutsche*. It makes such a difference if there's a nice bit of female around, when you're feeling dim. What temperament! What breast-works! She was a one! He smiled indulgently.

So it would have to be Pic. He could trust Pic absolutely. A pity Pic was such a terror, the sort of cove who, on principle, would far rather strangle someone than say good morning to him.

He might even take the parcel along himself, he thought, if the worst came to the worst.

His blood ran cold.



"You blithering idiot!" he reproached himself. "And blow everything sky-high? You ought to be locked up! Well, I'd better be going back to the office, or Erna'll be making a scene. What a wench! What thighs! Just the way I like 'em!"

When he got to the office Erna had a headache.

"I hope you don't mind," said Erna, rolling those big Polish eyes at him. "But I'd awfully like to go home and lie down."

"Of course I mind," said Oskar, "your lying down alone. What do you think you're here for?"

"Anyhow, the Big Shot's been here. Old Müller. He says he wants you in his office the moment you get back."

"He came himself?"

"Yes."

"What's the matter?"

"How would I know? Well, will it be all right? See you tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow," said Oskar under his breath. He seemed quite absent-minded. He even forgot to kiss her.

V

The Warsaw Ghetto, like the other Ghettoes, can be compared to a doomed animal, upon which parasites varying in size and virulence settled and fattened. One of the various deaths imposed on it was death by starvation, though this was done by slow degrees, in order that a certain amount of labour might be extracted from the creature during the period of starvation. As a result of this slowness, the animal developed certain wily methods of supplementing its ration; though the ration remained murderously meagre despite every ingenuity, and males and females of all ages died of hunger in streets, houses, cellars, or of diseases directly due to hunger.

As events showed, the heart of the animal still beat with pride, though the body became atrophied in places. But, till the very end, the carcase nourished parasites, which nourished parasites in turn. There were profiteers, racketeers, blackmailers, informers, stool-pigeons, stooges. The very stooges had their stooges.

Herr Kahn was all of these, though, in the last analysis, he was the Nazi stooge-in-chief, unless it could be said the eminence was disputed by Leon Ashkenazi. He was Big Stooge, who kept a host of little stooges busy, and one of these was the luscious *volksdeutsche* lady, Erna Doblin, secretary to Oskar von Straupitz-Kalmin. Herr Kahn had been born and bred in Warsaw. There was nothing of the graft and corruption of the various Warsaw underworlds, political, industrial, sexual, that Yacki Kahn did not



know. It was stated, with considerable plausibility, that Kahn could have finagled himself out of immurement in the Ghetto with great ease. He could have stayed on in "Aryan" Warsaw, perhaps; probably he could have got away to a neutral country. He was rich. He could pull countless strings. He could play all the stops of the organ of blackmail like the great master he was.

But he preferred to move into the Ghetto, it is told. He was, after all, a Jew, and it was chiefly among Jews that he had wielded his knotted flail of terror. From afar off his intensely well-trained nostrils scented the odours of corruption, and he came flapping down like a vulture, bald of neck, screeching.

He was a big man, with broad shoulders and a huge chest; but he had the killer's small hands and feet. His face was rosy-red, so that the white weal of some old affray, drawn slant-wise across his forehead, showed up the more starkly. His eyes were bright green, the nose was small and stub. There were quite a number of Gestapo and S.S. men who looked a great deal more Jewish than he did. Perhaps that was one of the reasons for his exacerbation and fury. He looked so gloriously Aryan, but, alas, just was not. Maybe that was one of the reasons why the Germans found it less noxious to rub shoulders with him than it might have been. He looked almost Aryan, and if, to tell the truth, he was circumcized, so were they, quite a number of them.

But, in fact, throughout the whole history of the Warsaw Ghetto, except for that last episode with which this narrative is mainly concerned, Herr Kahn was indispensable to the Germans in a way that very few Jews were. He had a finger in every pie. He was the chief go-between in the sale of weapons from Germans to Jews, those very weapons which were to inflict a moral defeat on the Germans which must have made them wince with shame if all questions of moral defeat and victory had not long ago been decided. The Jews derived their weapons from several sources. The Polish Underground Movement supplied them with a good deal. A good deal was smuggled through the various channels. A certain amount had been buried by the Jews along with their dead, as the Germans rightly alleged, and was disinterred from time to time. A little was locally manufactured. But the greater part was sold by the Germans through the agency of Kahn, in return for gold and silver, furs and silks, secretly stored pictures and carpets, which the Jews yielded up with exactly as much fervour as their ancestors had done thousands of years ago in Judaea, when the High Priest demanded from the rich man his treasure, from the poor man his mite, that the Temple might be builded up to the Glory of the Lord.

It might have been thought that some of the Germans, at least, might have been made a little uneasy by the thought of selling arms to those caged



and desperate men who, some day, surely, must use them against themselves or their kinsmen. But corrupt men do not reason in that fashion. And, if they reasoned at all, they must have reflected that the firing off of those machine-guns and rifles, the throwing of those grenades, could only accelerate the dropping of bombs, the hurtling of shells, which, in fact, they so thunderously provoked.

The German eye glittered frostily behind its eye-glass. Heads they lose, tails we win.

The arms racket was important to Herr Kahn. Herr Kahn was important to the arms racket. Both the Germans and the Jews would have had to invent a Herr Kahn if there had not been one there already; or, more likely, Herr Schwarz, his one-time rival, would have moved up one. In addition to the arms racket, there was the flour racket, the forged document racket, the racket in the sale and manufacture of Jew emblems, the Jewish police racket, the Wonder-Rabbi racket. Herr Kahn was important in all these. It may sound disrespectful to the Wonder-Rabbi, to speak of racket in association with him, but none is intended. It was not he that was the racketeer. It was, as has been made plain, Herr Kahn principally, in association with many others. Of the Jewish police, too, it could be said they were not all racketeers, certainly those that killed themselves were not.

The Jewish Police Force of the Ghetto was chosen by the Nazis themselves, in other Ghettos or in Warsaw, to keep law and order. The Nazis even insisted on taking credit to themselves for permitting the Jews to be policed thus by their own kinsmen. The device was a familiar one in their repertoire; one they adopted in all their schemes whether on a continental or a parochial scale. For purposes of policing, fomenting discord, spying, and the hundred kindred activities, they always sought out kinsmen of their intended victims. The procedure was in the last degree useful. It diverted odium from themselves, and they appreciated that, not because they were perturbed by odium in itself, as because it was sometimes discovered to be a grit in the working of their wheels. They took care to appoint only such Jews as seemed to come as close as mere Jews might to that square-jawed thug type acclaimed as the Teuton ideal by such philosophers as Herr Goering and Herr Streicher. Perhaps some were enlisted in the early days, genuinely believing that the existence of a Jewish Police Office might mitigate the miseries into which their kinsmen must certainly be plunged by the setting up of Ghetto walls. These were quickly undeceived, and almost as quickly these put an end to themselves. A few were agents of the Polish Underground, or of the Jewish Fighting Organization which took in hand the final encounter. But in others the Nazis were not disappointed. Swaggering about in their uniforms, armed with revolver and cudgel, they did the work of their masters with increasing efficiency and violence. It is true



that they wore the Jew badges of shame on their sleeves and in their caps. That was so that they should not get above themselves; they were to remember that, after all, Jews they had been born, and Jews they would die. In the meantime, they could go to it.

Yacki Kahn was not himself a policeman, of course; not even the senior officer of the Police Force. That honour was assigned to a small rat-faced man with a short bristling moustache, a minute chin and sloping shoulders, named Sempel. He certainly was not of the admired square-jawed type, but he had sharp eyes and a sharp brain. Unfortunately, he *had* got above himself; he had been *frech*, insolent; he had been giving it out that if the truth were known he was probably an Aryan, at all events as Aryan as some of his opposite numbers in the S.S. So, after the January rising, he had to be sent off in a lime-caked truck as if he were a mere tailor or University Professor. A pity, Herr Müller is reported to have said. There would have been no April rising if Sempel had been still on the job.

Herr Kahn was himself no policeman, but he had power of life and death over the Jewish Police Force. It was he who decided who was *kess* or not *kess*, to use the Berlin phrase, tough or not tough. It was he who decided whether his experiences in the discharge of his duty had got a Jewish policeman down and made a sissy out of him. It was he who sent Sempel on the Journey, spluttering and nattering like a caged rat dropped into a tub of water. Herr Kahn was a big man in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Big men in such circumstances have many agents. One of these, it has been said earlier, was Erna Doblin, Straupitz-Kalmin's secretary. On the eventful day with which we are now dealing, which was, in fact, April the nineteenth, Erna Doblin had a headache. She did not really have a headache, though it would have been small wonder if she had.

"Something's up!" she had told herself, after the descent by Herr Müller on Herr Straupitz-Kalmin's office. "I'd better keep an ear cocked! It may be worth a zloty or two to yours sincerely." So she had kept an ear cocked. She had managed to learn, two good hours before it became general property, that He, whom one did not name, would be in Warsaw tomorrow. So she rolled her big eyes at her employer. "I've got a headache," she said. "I want to go home and lie down."

But all she wanted to do was to visit the Café Bella Vista, and have a word with Yacki Kahn. For that was the understanding.

"I trust you, Erna darling, like I trust my own mother," Yacki had told her. He went to bed with her, too, as Straupitz-Kalmin did. It didn't impair her flavour for him, while as for Straupitz-Kalmin, he didn't know anything about it. The Gestapo, doubtless, did know about it. It was a clear case of the pollution of a *volksdeutsche* maiden by a Jew-swine. But



they turned a blind eye to it, though they did not fail to chalk it up on the slate.

"I trust you, Erna darling," said Yacki. "When you learn something good, come straight to me at the Bella Vista. Even if it's not worth a peanut, I still give you a dollar or two. And if it's worth a diamond bracelet, you get a diamond bracelet, maybe two diamond bracelets. Besides, it's always a pleasure to see you."

So Erna left the Food Control Office, and went off in one direction, and turned on her tracks in another direction, and fetched up some minutes later at the Café Bella Vista. The place wasn't much of a café, and it certainly couldn't be said it commanded a bella vista. It was a hang-out. There the Jewish policemen forgathered, and the Yunaks, at least those Yunaks who found it possible to breathe the same air as a bunch of Yids. The lady who ran it was a Frau Polaček, the impeccably *volksdeutsch* widow of an at least Aryan Czech. The place was licensed, of course; the unlicensed hang-outs were less public. The loyal servants of the Führer, even such lowly ones as Ukrainians, Lithuanians and Latvians, even such subhuman ones as Jewish policemen, had to have somewhere where they could relax, and have a drink and swap yarns. There was ersatz coffee and bad beer to drink. There was a rather woody sausage, with any amount of pickles to help it down.

Herr Kahn was only a civilian, and a Jew, and he had no right to be at the Bella Vista. But he was a very popular habitué. He did a great deal of his business there. He used to chuck Frau Polaček on the chin, and she used to resent it at first, till she discovered how important he was; then she would whinny archly, and drew her head back till her ear-rings tinkled. There was a picture of the Führer on one wall, and a lady opposite him, advertising, oddly, the cigarettes of Messrs. Ogden, an English firm. The lady wore the décolleté of the Edwardian era, voluptuously revealing the initial swelling of her left breast.

Yes, Herr Kahn was there, at the Bella Vista, when Erna Doblin got there. He was playing dominoes with a couple of his favourite Jewish policemen and a Lithuanian Yunak.

"Hello, beautiful!" exclaimed Yacki, when the lady entered, smacking her heartily on the behind. "How's tricks?" he said, or the Polish equivalent of that.

"Hello, Herr Kahn!" said Erna respectfully, rolling her lovely eyes at him. At the same time she readjusted, as if it were chafing her, the gold chain she wore round her throat, with a mother-of-pearl cross hanging from it. "I've got something to tell you," the movement said.

Herr Kahn's eyelids flickered.

"I've got it!" he conveyed, and went on with the dominoes for a minute



or two longer. "A glass of beer, Erna?" he asked. "Come and sit down. My leg's cold!" She sat down. The glass of beer was set down before her. "To hell with this!" Herr Kahn said. "The stones won't come out!" He scattered the dominoes over the tables and floor. The three other players shuffled off. It was evident the great Herr Kahn was more interested in his new partner. "What a neck!" exclaimed Herr Kahn. "Like a swan!" He kissed it. "Well?" he asked under his breath.

"A diamond necklace, *at least!*" she insisted.

"What is it?" he asked again.

"*Him!*" she brought out. "In Warsaw—tomorrow morning."

Herr Kahn said nothing for some seconds. Automatically, as if they had nothing to do with the rest of his body, his fingers went on squeezing the woman's breasts. The blood receded on both sides of the white weal on his forehead, so that it seemed whiter than before.

"Definite?" he asked.

"Definite!" she assured him.

The mouse-like fingers stopped their scampering.

"Go away now!" said Herr Kahn. "I'm not in the mood for nothing!"

"What about *something?*" Erna wanted to know, pouting. "You promised me——"

"Shut your snout!" said Herr Kahn quite loudly. Everybody heard. But no one thought it either wise or tactful to turn round. Little breezes will always spring up between even the best-adjusted lovers. Then Herr Kahn's hand dived down into his trouser pocket. He brought up a little lapis lazuli trinket-box set with gems.

"What about this?"

Erna's hands fastened round it.

"Yow!" she yelped delightedly.

"For Christ's sake, shove off!" requested Herr Kahn.

Erna thought the remark, coming from a Jew, in dubious taste. But the lapis lazuli box was not. She shoved off.

## VI

Herr Müller had risen to his high post in the Gestapo world less because of his intelligence than because of his orthodoxy and energy, both most commendable virtues. He was not intelligent, but he was not foolish enough to believe that he would solve the difficulties created by the imminent visit of his supreme chief by having the Jewish bread-ration reduced to twenty grammes, or even cut out altogether.

His visit to the Generalinspektor at the Food Control Office down the

street had been the result of a mere impulse. He wanted to shout and storm at someone, and the pale eyes and silky hair of Straupitz-Kalmin had suddenly obtruded themselves upon the screen of his mind.

As he walked back to his office, he realized he was quite pleased, on the whole, that the Generalinspektor wasn't there, he was gallivanting around somewhere with one of his wenches.

"I'll have a word with Einert instead," decided Herr Müller. Einert was one of his chief assistants, a thin-lipped fellow, with a thin nose, not good-looking, but clever as a barrel of monkeys. "You can *talk* to Einert."

So he talked to Einert. He explained what Einert didn't already know, and it was odd how little that was, seeing that it was only a matter of half an hour or so since the whole thing had blown up from nowhere, a black cloud in a clear sky.

"It seems to me," Herr Müller decided portentously, "if there *is* a discrepancy, the obvious thing is to deliver the goods. See?" He had another glass of cognac.

Einert waited. So did Herr Müller. Then, realizing that Einert had nothing to say for the moment, Herr Müller continued:

"If the Reichsführer can be told tomorrow that the goods are there all right and have just been stored and not delivered for some reason or another, everything's O.K." He warmed to it:

"Say the heads of the warehouses are responsible for having stored the goods instead of delivering them. You can shoot the six of them and say they've been punished, and then have the goods delivered. See?" He patted his stomach approvingly.

Einert waited some moments, for a belch was manifestly on its way up from the recesses of his chief's stomach. It asserted itself, then subsided.

"Not at all bad," Einert approved. "But there's one real difficulty. The goods aren't there, are they?"

"What? No! Of course not. Too bad, too bad. What about calling the Herren Kahn and Ashkenazi and the others—what about telling them they must deliver the goods at once? They work wonders, those fellows, when you apply a match to the seat of their trousers."

"That would be fine . . . if the goods are in existence. But they aren't."

"Too bad for them if they aren't." Müller raised the small bottle-glass eyes, rather bloodshot by this time.

There was a long silence. Then Einert spoke again.

"May I speak frankly, Herr Müller?"

"That's what you're here for."

"It won't take us very far if we liquidate the whole lot of those Kahns



and Ashkenazis. What does it amount to? A dozen or a dozen and a half."

"Well?"

"If there's a discrepancy, if there are too many heads and not enough produce, you can restore the situation either by increasing the produce or"—he hesitated a moment—"or reducing the heads."

Herr Müller looked up sharply. The bottle-glass eyes glittered.

"You mean——"

"But it's very clear what I mean, Herr Müller. It won't explain away the discrepancy, of course it won't. But it will divert attention from it. And it will cause a good deal of pleasure in the highest quarters—as these measures always do."

"When once we start again, Einert, it's not likely we'll be able to stop." There was a certain wistful, even a maudlin, quality in Herr Müller's voice. It had been a beautiful racket, a beautiful goose. The gold eggs had been large and regular.

"There's plenty more Jews where those came from," Einert pointed out.

"I'm not too sure," sighed Herr Müller. "You don't think we're beginning to scrape the bottom of the bucket?"

"Not for a long time," Einert assured him.

Herr Müller said nothing for some time. He was thinking things over. His belly whimpered in the obscure processes of digestion.

He rose. He staggered a little. The cognac always affected his knees.

"Otto!" he said . . . Otto, not Einert. "What a help you are! What a comrade!" He went up to him and kissed him on both cheeks.

Einert rose, and clicked his heels.

"At your service, Herr Müller!" he exclaimed. "In my view, your solution meets the problem at all points." The thin lips of Herr Einert had completely disappeared, but an odd red glow suffused the sharp nose, till the organ glowed like a twig of coral.

Oskar walked along the block to Gestapo House and passed the sentries without trouble. They knew him, of course. He went straight up to Herr Müller's office, but Herr Müller was engaged, he was frightfully busy; would the Generalinspektor please wait a few minutes in the anteroom?

"Certainly not!" flared Herr Straupitz-Kalmin. "The matter is urgent!" He swept into the chief's office.

The chief was on the telephone. He seemed to be convening the Jewish Council again. Convening the Jewish Council, and letting them have it, was one of his favourite pastimes.

Oskar coughed.

"Excuse me, Herr Müller."



Herr Müller did not hear. Oskar advanced two or three yards, and repeated the words more loudly.

"Excuse me, Herr Müller, I believe you wanted to talk to me——"

"What the blue blazes——" roared Herr Müller. He was quite well oiled. His cheeks were rosy. He turned. For a moment or two he did not seem to recognize his visitor. He glared, almost as if some subhuman Jew-creature had dared to penetrate to the Ark of the Covenant. Then recognition dawned in his eyes. The eyes contracted, as if they folded themselves round some dear and secret thought.

"Oh, it's you, Generalinspektor? I'm sorry. As you see, I'm telephoning. Is there anything I can do for you?" He spoke with extraordinary mildness and kindness, seeing who he was, and who the caller was, a civilian, after all, a clerk.

Oskar's manner became even more frigid than it normally was in the presence of Herr Müller.

"You came to my office. Something urgent, you said. I was to see you at once."

"Something urgent? Why, yes, of course! Hi, you there!" He returned his mouth to the mouthpiece of the telephone. "Hold on till I come back again!" He came back to Oskar. "I was coming to have a word with you about the Jews' bread-ration. There have been complaints. It's excessive!"

"The quantity of the bread-ration is no concern of mine," Oskar pointed out, "only its administration."

"Quite so, quite so." Herr Müller sounded quite merry. He took another swig of cognac. "But it's all right now, it's perfectly all right. You can retain it at its present level for the time being." His tone changed. Really, it was impossible to say whether the man was drunk or pretending to be. "You may not be aware that S.S. Reichsführer Himmler intends to honour us with a visit tomorrow morning?"

"Most agreeable." The tone committed Oskar to neither knowledge nor enthusiasm. His heart prodded against his ribs like an animal in a bag.

"It has been arranged to celebrate the Reichsführer's visit in a manner he will appreciate." The tone was as correct as an old-time civil servant's.

"I am to be informed?" asked Oskar.

"Of course, Generalinspektor. Your department will be directly involved." There was a brief silence. Herr Müller tapped the broad finger-tips against each other two or three times. He was either far off in an empyrean of intoxication, or he was stone sober all of a sudden, in a matter of a few seconds. "The ration will remain the same, but tomorrow there will be five thousand fewer Jews in the Ghetto to provide for. You understand, Generalinspektor?"



"I understand. There is to be a renewal of the transports to the East tomorrow morning, Herr Müller." Oskar stood rigid, his arms stretched down his sides, his eyes staring straight before him.

"Exactly," boomed Müller jovially. "For my own part I enjoy the transports a good deal. Don't you, Generalinspektor? The place has been dead during the last few months. It needs livening up. It means a lot more work for all departments, of course, except perhaps yours. But it's worth it. Frankly, it's what we're here for. Isn't it?"

The fellow waited for a reply, the finger-tips motionless against each other, each eye a narrow slit.

What's he up to? Oskar asked himself. What does he think I might do? Loosen my collar and gasp for air? What does he know? Is all this just routine? Or does he know everything? Does he know I've got Elsie hidden away somewhere in the Ghetto? And if Elsie's somewhere in the Ghetto, that the chances are she might be in one of the blocks that will be rounded up tomorrow?

Elsie! Elsie! Husky-voiced Elsie! Sloe-eyed Elsie, with the breasts like small firm apples and the smell of bitter almonds always around her.

You're a clever one, aren't you, Oskar Straupitz-Kalmin? You've got the two of you into a pretty pickle, haven't you, Mr. Clever?

"Isn't it?" repeated Müller softly.

"As a civil administrator," said Oskar evenly, "I would not presume to have opinions on matters of high policy."

The answer was, evidently, satisfactory.

"Well, that's how it is!" said Herr Müller merrily. "A transport tomorrow morning at six. And a transport the day after. Four transports in all, on four succeeding days—at least to begin with. You'll make your modifications accordingly?"

"At your service, Herr Müller!"

"A glass of cognac, Straupitz-Kalmin?" But it was only a form of words. Herr Müller filled his own glass, and did nothing at all about producing a second glass. He swigged it down. With that miraculous promptness, the filaments lit up in his face. "Good God!" he bellowed. He had noticed the telephone-receiver lying disconnected on the desk beside him. "Those Jews! Hi, you! Tell them they're to report for instructions at two this afternoon."

"Is that all, Herr Müller?"

"That's all." Herr Müller made a gesture dismissing his caller towards the door as if he were an errand-boy.

"Heil Hitler!"

"Heil Hitler!"



Oskar walked down the stairs, past the sentries and out into the street with a portentous slow-footedness which might have seemed almost comic, like the movements of a large policeman in an early Keystone movie. He was afraid that if he did not plant his feet down, deliberately, heavily, step for step, he would suddenly find himself running northward through the Ghetto streets, shouting: "Elsie! Elsie! For God's sake, clear out of it while there's time! They're getting up the Death Journey again! They'll start the softening-up this very night! They'll go about with guns and torches! They'll poke bayonets under beds and into cupboards! Get out of it, Elsie darling! . . ."

"Where?" asked a far faint voice. God knows where.

I must walk warily, he told himself, I must think clearly. It will be bad enough if she's rounded up and sent on the Journey with all the others. It will be worse if I lead them to her, and they get their hands on her. They can still send her on the Journey, two or three days later—whatever is left of her.

I'll get back to the office. I'll count up what chances we've got. I must have a drink of something or I'll pass out.

He got back into his office again, and poured himself out half a tumbler of crystal Schnaps, some distillation from potato, or rye, or turnip, or something. It had the kick of a mule. His inside was like the inside of a paprika stew-pot. That's going to help, he told himself.

What am I going to try and do? That's the first thing I must make clear to myself. I must get her out. Out of where? Out of Wolff's house? Out of Gesia Street? Out of the Ghetto?

Why get her out? How do things stand if she stays? The Jewish Council will have the job of deciding which blocks will be rounded up for tomorrow's Journey. There'll be five thousand taken off tomorrow. What chance does that give her? One chance in seven or eight. But there's to be a consignment the day after, and for two days after that. Remember Himmler's due here. When once the thing gets under way, there's every chance they'll keep the thing going. There won't be a chance for her in a hundred.

I must try and get her out today, this very day, the first possible moment.

What do you propose to do, supposing you get her out? Remember they're very much on the qui vive for her, all over the place. What a peach to present on a plate to old Himmler, they all know that! Well, what would you do then, that you couldn't do yesterday, or the day before? *The day before yesterday?* God in Heaven, it seems like ten thousand years!

What would you do? Exactly what you proposed to do, in any case, the moment the coast was clear and you got her out of the Ghetto. Disguise



her as an old crony, a bale of straw, God knows what, and get her out of it, east, west, north, south. The Polish Underground might have helped. One might have put it across that she's an English agent who'd lost her memory. Oh, something, anything.

But we're not there yet. Elsie's still in the Ghetto. We must get Elsie out first. When? Now! As soon as possible! Back the way she came, maybe. It'll be full of danger outside the Wall, but it's hell itself inside.

The first thing I must do is get hold of Wolff. Wolff must fix it up, as he did before. Suppose Wolff isn't at the bakehouse? He wasn't there yesterday when I sent Pic with that parcel. He wasn't at home, either, when Pic went on to Gesia Street. There was no answer. If Wolff had been there, he'd have opened the door. He'd have guessed it was somebody from me. If it had been a policeman or an S.S. man, Wolff would have known it's no good not opening the door. They'd break open the door if they wanted to get in. Almost certainly his wife was there. I understand she practically never goes out. That's one reason why I hit on the Wolffs, anyhow. She was probably afraid to open the door. And Elsie was there, of course. Wolff's no liar. He's a racketeer, but he's no liar.

Couldn't you guess, Elsie, it was a message from me? No, not a box of chocolates, this time, but a pound of garlic sausage. You've always said something tells you when I'm in the offing, even years before I actually get there. Well, your instinct let you down this time. Or would you say Pic wasn't me? He gives off another sort of odour. I shouldn't be at all surprised.

He sent Pic off to Wolff at the bakehouse. Wolff's men were there, working, but Wolff was not there. They had no idea when he would be there again.

Wolff's busy, Oskar told himself. Everyone's busy down there; in the cellars, in the arms-dumps. Things are going to happen. The hayrick's smouldering. It'll go up in blazes any time now. I must get hold of her. I must get her out of it. I wish to God I could go and fetch her myself. Fancy asking her to trust herself to a man-killer like Pic! But she'll know I can't come myself. She'll know if I came myself it would finish everything.

So he duly sent Pic to the Wolff apartment in Gesia Street. He could not send Elsie a note, of course, in case somehow something went wrong with Pic. But Pic was reliable, despite his intense partiality for homicide. Pic was to get into the apartment somehow. He was not to let himself be turned away this time. If nobody answered the door, as happened yesterday, he was not to resist the temptation to break it open. He'd find an axe or a battering-ram somewhere. Oskar was not afraid of drawing the attention of the S.S. guards or the Jewish police to those high jinks. Pic



had his credentials. If he wanted to do a bit of house-smashing and raping on his own, nobody would spoil his fun for him.

Pic must break in. He would find two women there. Perhaps Herr Wolff would be there, too. That wouldn't matter. He would have no trouble finding out which woman was which. He must bring the one that wasn't Frau Wolff to the bakehouse, leave her in the darkest corner he could find, then come back for instructions.

But Pic never came back for instructions. He had no more been able to gain ingress to the apartment by knocking today than yesterday. He had picked himself a useful battering-ram in the basement, and was having a good time ramming away at the door, when Wolff appeared on the scene. Pic was having a good time. A hint of something, almost of colour, had come into his eyes, so that the pupils were quite visible. The breath was coming in happy spurts through his teeth.

Herr Wolff looked round. This job of house-smashing seemed a one-man job. Wolff was in a violent mood and did not pause to reflect, or it might have occurred to him that Pic was an accredited representative from Herr von Straupitz-Kalmin. But that is not the way your mind works when you see a tow-haired thug smashing down the door of an apartment where two women must be shaking in the most abject terror. Besides, the mood of violence was already abroad in the Warsaw Ghetto. Certain violent decisions had already been, or were being, taken. Wolff slipped a lead sash out of his pocket and brought it down on Pic's skull. Wolff was a strong man, and though Pic's was a strong skull, it caved in like three-ply wood.

"It'll do in the basement," Wolff murmured. "There'll be other bodies soon, up and around the place."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### I

THE Ashkenazis and the Kahns were by no means the only captains of Jewish affairs in the Warsaw Ghetto. There were others, whose existence it has been possible so far to deal with only briefly, like Berel, for instance, who functioned wholly underground, and his henchman, Mickal, who wove between the underground and the open air—if you could describe work in the leather factory as open air. It was these underground leaders whose influence was finally to triumph. It was they, not Ashkenazi, not Kahn, who had the last word.

The standing of Ashkenazi and Kahn was curiously equivocal, being at once unofficial, yet authorized. And if that could be said of the status



of those gentlemen, the twilight in which the *Judenrat* existed was even more dubious. The *Judenrat* were the body of twenty-four councillors to whom the administration of Jewish communal affairs was delegated by the conquerors, in accordance with their well-known technique of shifting responsibility from their own shoulders for the discharge of affairs which were at once arduous and unpleasant. It is a device of which it can be said that it is at the heart of all successful organization, and there the Germans are undisputed masters. In the case of the Warsaw Ghetto, the impetus towards the fulfilment of assigned tasks was more compelling than usual; for, if they were not fulfilled, the councillors were beaten up in the cellars below Gestapo House, held as hostages, and, if necessity demanded, either some or all of their number were executed.

The Council was constituted as easily as it was decimated or liquidated. If for any reason at all a number of the members had not turned up—as, for instance, one man had shot himself, another had died one of the various deaths that stalked the Ghetto, a third had been taken on the Journey—the Gestapo merely appointed that the missing tally should be made up by impounding any Jews that might happen to be in the building, or passing in the street outside.

The normal dues of a civilized community were summarily denied the Ghetto Jews, other than those arising from interment in the cemetery. The councillors were informed that no objections would be raised, however much the sums totalled derived from this source. Altogether, it can be seen, the Warsaw *Judenrat* functioned under grave inconveniences. But the Germans achieved what they set out to achieve. The transactions of the *Judenrat* were conducted under a cloak of legality. So it was that the Reichskanzler himself had first attained power. So it was that one country after another was invaded. It displays a respect for the sanction of law which must be placed to the credit of the Germans in the final reckoning-up.

It was no later than twelve-thirty p.m. of this day that the Jewish policemen who were assigned to the duty summoned the councillors to an extraordinary session. The session was to be held in the old Council House at two p.m. precisely.

By two o'clock not more than fourteen councillors had turned up at the Council House, a building characterized by its open doors. The councillors, whether few in session or many, were pathetically anxious to insist they discussed no secrets. Nearly every room was not only open but empty; the welfare departments, of course, because there was no welfare to administer. The Council Chamber itself, once the sanctissimum secretissimum of a large and prosperous community, had its doors flung wide like the rest. The room still had a certain sombre magnificence, with its fine oak



panelling, its Rembrandtian portraits of bearded rabbis and councillors, the sweeping half-circles of polished benches. The wood and canvas remained; what there had been of metal was gone, of course: the bronze Menorah candlesticks, the sconces and chandeliers, the minuscule *mezuzahs* upon the door-posts, though these were removed only for wantonness, for there was not more than a halfpennyworth of metal in each. The time had been when eighty delegates and as many auditors were forgathered in that place, debating communal policy with acrimony, sometimes, but always with scholarship. The fourteen councillors huddled together now on the front bench were a woebegone crowd.

It can be said that the non-appearance of the remaining ten councillors was the first clear challenge of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto to the Nazi dominion. It is possible that the message did not reach some who might have obeyed it if it had. It is also possible that some were already dead. It was not easy to keep pace with Death in those sealed streets; he was always a yard ahead. But it is certain that some did not appear, either because they had already gone underground and were taking stock of their armament, or then and there went underground, knowing that the unequal but glorious battle must now within a matter of hours be engaged. So unostentatiously do great events slide from the world of dreaming into the world of doing.

For the news had gone abroad. Himmler would be in Warsaw tomorrow. It was news that could not be contained within the conduits of the telephonic wires, or behind the lips of the men who had transmitted and received the information. It leaked, like a gas. The whole air stank with it.

Himmler is coming. Himmler is coming. It can mean only one thing. The death-trains are going to be shunted into Stawki sidings again. The death-trains are going to set out on the Journey again. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.*

Of the fifty, sixty thousand people officially and unofficially in the Ghetto—the number will never accurately be known—many had sought to delude themselves that the lull in the deportations was permanent; that, for no logical reason that could be adduced, the Germans at this point had decided to cry Halt! After all, there were a great many people making a good thing out of all this. And, surely, not even the Nazis could envision total liquidation, total extermination, with equanimity. It is a thing so final, so palpable, it cannot be hidden from the world. There can be, in such a case, no more conducted tours of neutral journalists to testify to the Germans' solution of the Jewish question, at once so humane and so scientific. To these last survivors in the Ghetto nothing could happen, they told themselves, beyond the probable deaths from starvation, dysentery and typhoid, and the more chancy deaths from Gestapo high spirits.



Nothing could happen. Excepting only if Himmler came again to Warsaw. He had been twice before: once, and the Ghetto was established; a second time, and the death-trains went out on the Journey. If Himmler came again, it could mean only one thing. There was no one in the Ghetto who did not know what that was, Jew or Gentile. The S.S. men, the Gestapo men, the Civil officials and employees, the Yunaks, the Hitler boys, they all knew it. The Polish helpers and Soviet emissaries knew it. The Jewish working men and women, the children, the racketeers, the policemen, the politicians and fighters, the Wonder-Rabbi of Semienka, Herr Ashkenazi, Herr Kahn, Artur the Pole, Berel, Klepfizch, all these knew it.

Himmler was coming to the Ghetto tomorrow. Come to terms, Jew, with Lord Jehovah, Lord of Hosts; or take up your gun, clean the barrel, look to the gun-sights!

Those members of the *Judenrat* convened for the extraordinary session at two p.m. who turned up, turned up on time. Usually they arrived with a full half-hour to spare, they were so anxious to prove to their masters that they were on their toes. The secretary of the Council, by name Avrom Godol, was there, at a side table, with papers and ledgers before him. It was some seconds to two o'clock, and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the councillors had not yet arrived. The S.S. guard that invariably attended the deliberations of the Jewish Council was more meticulous. At exactly two o'clock, the Scharführer—the Sergeant, that is—and his two men clanked in. They did not say a word; the "Heil Hitler" was not permitted to sanctify the polluted atmosphere. There was a clomp of boots taking up positions, a rattle of rifles going through some swift unceremonious manoeuvre, and the Third Reich was on guard, its ear cocked lest the Warsaw Sanhedrin devise further mischief against the Aryan concert of peoples. It was five minutes past two, then ten minutes past two, and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council had still not put in an appearance. The two S.S. men remained expressionless as faceless images in a gallery. The eyes of the Sergeant looked briefly up to the clock and darkly down again. A slight twist came ominously into the mouth.

The councillors were sweating with apprehension. The emotion was more confused than that. There were some who doubtless said to themselves: "I shouldn't have come at all, as this one or that one urged. I should have gone down after him in the cellar. I shall die in any case. But in the other case I might have died with a gun in my hands. Or a shell might have obliterated me, without anyone witnessing my shame. Now we shall be mocked and beaten up in the Gestapo cells, and die after all. I have always been a coward. Forgive me, O Lord my God." There were others who may have said: "What is the ruling? Do deliberations take place only in



full Council, or only in full quorum? We are more than half our numbers. Is that enough for a session? I want to get this over, whatever happens; whether they let us go again, or carry us off to their den. But why should I make myself more conspicuous than the others? You know how it is with the Germans. They at once will make me more responsible than the others. *For thou art the God of my strength: why dost thou cast me off? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?*

Was it not the place of the Secretary to the Council to take the lead and decide the procedure that was to be followed? What was he paid for? Why was he shuffling about among his papers, his spectacles pushed back against his forehead, as if he were trying to find out what was wrong with the Petty Cash? But whether or not he was paid, he was certainly no councillor. He had neither right nor duty to take things upon himself.

There was a slight gurgle in the throat of one of the councillors, the one second on the left-hand side. A runnel of blood came up from the corner of his mouth. He was further gone in his consumption than the one or two other consumptives in the company. He took out a handkerchief and put it to his mouth; then, whatever spirit he had for living seemed to go up out of him like a smoke; he put his head on the bench before him and spread his arms out on both sides of it, so that the hands dangled loosely. It was not easy to sense whether he was alive or dead.

Perhaps it occurred to Avrom Godol, the secretary, that if one more member of the Council passed out of action this way, there would be only half a Council there, with no Chairman or Vice-Chairman to give a casting vote. That would add a great deal to the technical difficulties that already surrounded them. Doubtless, too, he considered that whatever lay ahead, he would not be treated more gently than anyone else, whatever he did, or did not do.

There was a snap of a ledger closed to. Godol was on his feet. The spectacles were down over on his nose again, the lenses so thick you could not see the eyes. He was a small man, with a rather hurt face, the hair standing up all round it. The mouth was sensitive and intelligent.

"*Yidden*," he said, "Jews. It seems there's a mistake. Perhaps our respected Chairman and Vice-Chairman never got the message summoning them to today's meeting. Perhaps they set out and haven't got here. It isn't my place as Secretary to the Council to make any suggestions"—there were murmurs of "Go on! Go on!"—"but I think it wouldn't be wise if the proceedings didn't begin quite soon. They can't begin without a temporary Chairman. You would doubtless like to appoint him amongst yourselves, as is fitting. Or it may be your senior member should automatically take the position." He stopped. He shut his eyes, though that was not visible across the thick lenses. "If it is desired among you, I would



myself accept the situation, though it would be scarcely fitting." There was a pause. There was not one man there, except the one with his head between his hands, who was not aware that the proposition was heroic. The Nazi system in great and in small affairs could not function without its scapegoat. Godol was proposing to concentrate responsibility upon himself for the non-appearance of the two senior officials. He would not be let down lightly.

A gust of shame spread among the assembled councillors, like a shiver of wind in a line of trees by a river. "No! No!" they murmured. "Why him?"

"Excuse!" said Herr Padower, a one-time estate agent from Breslau, the veteran among those councillors; whatever natives had been of their number had long ago been despatched, or had committed suicide, like Czerniakow, the first Chairman after the establishment of the Ghetto. Padower walked over to the dais and sat down. He brought the palm of his hand on to a cheap bell that stood beside an empty water-jug and a dirty beaker. "I declare the session open. I call on the Secretary to read the minutes of the last meeting." The S.S. men made no sign. Or was there the tiniest shadow of a shadow of a grin on the mouth of the Sergeant? Was there even a shadow of forlorn and desolate mirth on the mouth of Herr Padower?

The Sergeant knew, Padower the Chairman and Godol the Secretary knew, all the councillors knew, what a farce all this was. It was patent to them all why this extraordinary meeting had been convened. The Council had been convened before, in exactly the same circumstances, to fulfil the same duty. They were to receive instructions that so many Jews were to be assembled by a certain time on a certain day—probably next morning—at the Stawki Street sidings, for deportation to the "Labour Camps" out East. The responsibility for the execution of the order lay entirely with the Jewish Council, who had the corps of Jewish policemen at their disposal for the execution of the job. The Jewish Council would make the choice of individuals to be deported, so many and such-and-such house-blocks. The Jewish policemen would see that the regiments of the damned were duly rounded up.

The meeting was a farce, because if the Masters made up their minds on a certain policy, they did not need an assembly of councillors, about as effective as wisps of vapour, to help them execute it. It was the well-known cloak of legality. Was there not a Chairman, a quorum of councillors? Were there not minutes?

Yet there were certain elements of sense in the farce. What need had the Germans to lift a finger when Jews could do the job for them? And if there was to be resistance, such as the mushroom posters that sprang up



overnight had been advocating, why not expose the bodies of Jewish policemen to the first bullets?

The Secretary was on his feet, his spectacles pushed back; he was rearranging the papers and ledgers before him.

"Mr. Chairman and Councillors," he said. "I have been asked by Mr. Chairman to read the minutes of the last meeting. If this had been an ordinary meeting, I would have read them at once, and requested your permission to read the accounts of the dues received in respect of the burial of our brethren. There have also been some gifts from certain charitable members of the Community.

"But we're late, Mr. Chairman. This is an extraordinary session. Half an hour before the declared time of the meeting, an envelope was handed over to me in my office, from the Office of the Chief Executive of the Gestapo in Leszno Street. The envelope contained certain instructions and a further envelope, sealed, for which I duly signed a receipt. This is the envelope in my hand. I was requested to hand it over immediately to the Chairman of the Council." He stood waiting for some seconds. He seemed a most punctilious Secretary.

"If you please," said Mr. Chairman Padower.

Avrom Godol advanced to the table and handed the envelope over. It was like the rehearsal of a scene in a play, of which all the actors knew the action beforehand. There could be no surprise. The Chairman cracked the sealing-wax with his thumb and opened the envelope. It was difficult for the councillors to concentrate on the Chairman and the document in his hand, which the Chairman was, after all, only making a show of reading, he knew so exactly what it contained, except for one or two details. Even while he read, in dry and expressionless tones, the mind had moved on ahead of him, to the house-porter going round the block from apartment to apartment, delivering the order; to the long night that would not end, and the dawn that came too soon; to the policemen chivvyng the laggards with blows and curses and pistol-shots; to the cattle-trucks in the siding. . . .

The details clanged like gongs upon the ear. The twentieth. Yes. Next morning. The twentieth. At six o'clock.

The Chairman was still reading out the instructions. The mind of the councillors was not with the Chairman. It was with the children, if one still had one; with the children. It was at the end of the motor of the train talking.



sobbing, like a small child, his head between his hands. Half of the assembled councillors were sobbing. It was the noise heard in synagogues on the day of fasting, the ninth of Ab, the day on which, long ago, the Temple was razed to its foundations, and since then, nearly nineteen centuries ago, the Jews have bewailed their loss, with ashes and with torn garments, on the anniversary day as it came again.

Truly the Temple was destroyed again. Certain of the councillors wept, and shook their bodies from side to side, and beat their bosoms. The others sat there, like lumps of stone, motionless, with eyes dry as pebbles. There was a jolly grin on the face of the S.S. Sergeant and his two men.

It was the Secretary who brought the meeting back to the business in hand. He was the only professional there. He had a good sense of procedure.

"Mr. Chairman," he said. "It is my duty to record these transactions, and to convey your instructions wherever indicated. If it is necessary to proceed to discussion, may I suggest that this should be done? If not"—Godol shrugged his shoulders non-committally—"then not."

The Chairman turned towards the Secretary. His neck creaked as if it were some ill-oiled piece of mechanism. He was not young, and had not been spry and ruddy when he took the Chair over. But he looked ten years older than then, ten minutes ago.

"Thank you, Godol," he whispered hoarsely. He found the glass jug and the tumbler to his hand at the table. He reversed the tumbler and raised the jug; then he saw there was no water in it, and set both objects down again. The head creaked back again towards the brother councillors. "The request of the Authorities has been read out and made known to you." It was not easy to hear all he said, though he was only a few yards away. "Has the meeting any observations to make?"

He waited. One or two of the councillors were still weeping. They uttered words, but not to him nor to the meeting. They were words out of the Psalms of David. Their words did not seem to break the silence, but to be part of it, like the light of the moon, or the sighing of trees. It was as if those lamentations had been contained in the atmosphere like another element, ever since they were first uttered, in every land where Jews were. The silence continued, for three minutes, five minutes, eight minutes. The Gestapo men seemed to be in no hurry, or had been given instructions to be in no hurry. Now and again they shifted the weight of their bodies, and there was a click, a clank, from some object in their equipment. They were not having a bad time.

Only from the Secretary's table was there any noise at all, the sound of shuffling papers, ledgers being opened and shut to again. You might have



thought that he was overwhelmed with work in his office, and welcomed this lull in order to catch up with himself. At the tenth minute there was still silence. Except for those two that murmured strophes from the Psalms, the councillors seemed asleep, even the Chairman, who least of all had the right to fall down thus on his job.

"I am sorry, Mr. Chairman," said the Secretary, "if I seem to be taking too much on myself." Then suddenly, shockingly, he brought out a purely personal utterance, no longer Secretary, but plain Godol, with thick spectacles, a hurt, frightened face, a shiny clerkly suit, a pair of paper-thin shoes for which there had been no polish for a long time, but there still was a fine shine on them, so carefully had they been rubbed morning and evening by some hoarded velvet pad, by now almost void of nap.

Said Godol: "I wish I was dead, and, doubtless, soon shall be." Then it seemed to occur to him that he had read out a line which was not in his rôle. He lifted his spectacles, looked down among the papers, and got his rôle right again. "It becomes a question whether the instructions from the Authorities stand accepted without discussion, by default, as it were. In which case it is necessary to proceed to the second stage of the agenda. Mr. Chairman, I would appreciate your observations."

Then a voice spoke. It was not the Chairman's voice; it was, evidently, the voice of one of the councillors. It was an impersonal voice; like a ventriloquist's, almost. The consumptive raised his head from between his hands. The blood was dry now at the corner of his mouth.

"It is not admitted," said the voice, "that the instructions from the Authorities stand accepted without discussion."

The Councillors did not look up towards the Chairman. Their heads were bowed, as before. It was as if the voice deliberately separated itself from the speaker, lest it signal him out for the immediate chastisement of the Third Reich and its terrific panoply.

"Mr. Chairman," another voice said, "what difference will it make if we discuss the instructions or not?" This time there was no question where the voice came from. A man, the fourth from the right, lifted his round large head, the voice issued from the thick, the almost purple, lips.

This was a direct address to the Chairman, and must be taken up by him.

"Perhaps it is only to ourselves it makes a difference," said Herr Padower.

"In that case we can act either with shame, or with some pride." It was that disrelated voice speaking again, but less disrelated, less impersonal. It was the man with the straggly red beard and the pale blue eyes who was speaking, was it not?



There was a sudden sharp remonstrance.

"What does it matter how we act? Let us get it over quickly, for God's sake!"

Two other voices came up, as it were, from the depths:

"Yes, yes. Let us get it over quickly, for God's sake!"

The name of the man with the straggly red beard was Kazuch. The whole aspect of the man seemed to be taking on definiteness visibly, momentarily. His hand straightened the beard, so that it did not straggle as before. Both beard and eyes attained sharper colour. He looked towards the S.S. Sergeant, without defiance, estimating him, then he turned towards Herr Padower again.

"I don't think, Mr. Chairman, there'll be much in it if we act slowly or quickly, or if we don't act at all. If I may say so, in the old days when I had a business, I was always one for quality rather than quantity. I am, therefore, for quality now."

"I don't know what he means," said the man who had urged speed. His name was Ochran. His fingers were tapping away on the bench before him as if it were a typewriter. "Last time, too, he talked in riddles! Tcha! At a time like this, riddles!"

"I object!" shouted Kazuch. "It should not become a personal matter! Must it be with Jews always——"

"An anti-Semite!" cried Ochran.

"A plain anti-Semite!" echoed another.

"Order! Order!" proclaimed the Chairman, striking his bell. "*Yidden!* Remember yourselves!"

"I'm sorry!" murmured Kazuch. He did not have much stamina.

"I'm sorry, too!" said Ochran magnanimously.

"Can I speak, Mr. Chairman?" asked Kazuch.

"Go on!"

"I only wanted to say this. I'm tired. I don't want to argue with anybody. I only hope, whatever we do today, our children's children should not be ashamed, if any of us have children's children anywhere, and they should get to hear about us."

"I say again," the man with the thick purple lips observed, "what difference will it make if we discuss the instructions or not?" The man's name was Altbaum. "What can we do? Whatever is to happen, can we stop it?"

"What difference can it make?" asked Ochran. "Of course it can make a difference. Maybe not to me, and not to you, Mr. Chairman, and not to the other councillors . . . but if anyone has a wife or children, to them it can make a great difference. Maybe they would not be in the chosen number, not tomorrow, not the day after. While there's life there's hope.



But is there any question what will happen to them, if we go on arguing like this?"

No-one spoke for a little time. Once or twice Kazuch, the red-bearded one, seemed as if he wished to speak. He raised his head and moved his hand, but both drooped again.

"You wished to say anything, Herr Kazuch?" asked the Chairman.

Something had come over Kazuch. He seemed quite drowsy.

"I wasn't thinking," he murmured, "about the children." It was odd how quickly the flame had gone out of the beard and the light out of the eyes.

"Besides," said Altbaum, "after all, no one knows the whole truth. Perhaps a lot of it is exaggeration. Perhaps a great many do go to Labour Camps as well. A lot of work is wanted out there." He knew he lied. Everyone in the Council Chamber knew he lied. A flush seemed to spread from the purple lips outward till the cheeks, too, had the same tinge of purple.

No-one could so far forswear himself as to endorse that. One of the psalm-singers turned to Altbaum and fixed him with a contemptuous eye. Then he turned from him, not having desisted in the psalm-singing.

"I said perhaps," Altbaum miserably added.

"Well, Jews, how does it stand?" asked Herr Padower.

"What has been the procedure in the past?" a councillor asked, doubtless a newcomer.

The Chairman looked towards the Secretary. The Secretary looked back inquiringly. The Chairman nodded.

"The files of the population, block by block, street by street, are kept in the Secretary's office, as you know, Mr. Chairman," said Godol. "It has been the Secretary's duty to sort out by lot the blocks whose inhabitants will make up the total required for a given Journey."

There was quite a flurry of activity among the S.S. men. One adjusted his belt, another stamped twice with his right foot. The Sergeant coughed slightly. The rehearsal of the routine seemed to have made a certain slight impression upon their hitherto impassive minds and faces. The hymns flowed murmuring on, like a dark stream among rushes.

"Does any councillor wish to make any further observation?" asked Herr Padower.

No-one spoke. The silence became oppressive. Then the heart, rather than the ear, suggested that indeed a voice was shaping, had shaped, a few words. Perhaps the speaker spoke so low hoping that the guards would not hear him. Perhaps he did not know he spoke. It is possible he did not speak at all.

"It would have been good to die," breathed the voice, "with a gun in the hand."

The silence returned. No, the words had not been uttered.



"Is it the wish of the Council," the Chairman asked, "that the Secretary receive our instructions to sort out the lots as before?"

Even the psalm-singers fell upon silence now.

"What else?" a Jew answered, as a Jew often will, asking a question to avoid the direct Yes.

"Are there any objections?"

There were no objections. Avrom Godol was busy among the accounts, as if he was just on the trail of that few hundred zlotys which had gone so unaccountably astray from the Petty Cash.

"The Secretary is requested to withdraw for the performance of his task," said the Chairman. "The Council will remain convened until the Secretary returns from his office."

The Secretary did not seem to have heard. He was terribly wrapped up with those accounts.

The Chairman spoke again, slightly louder: "The Secretary is requested to withdraw for the performance of his task."

Godol thrust his head back sharply.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Chairman!" He rose, pushing the spectacles up on to the forehead. He looked for one moment into the eyes of the Chairman, then took all the councillors in in one glance. There was no reproach in his eyes, there was something even of pity. But the hurt was there, as always, about the corners of his mouth. Then he collected his books and papers, saying not another word. In a few seconds he was at the door. The S.S. man did not withdraw to let him pass. Godol slid between the doorpost and the man's body, and was out of the room.

What was there to do now, here in the Council Chamber? There was nothing to do, except to wait. The Sergeant allowed himself to relax slightly, allowing one shoulder-blade to touch the wall. The soldiers, of course, remained at attention. The Chairman took out a pouch, where there was some sort of tobacco, and rolled himself a cigarette. Two or three of the councillors did the same thing; one had an old pipe, broken at the mouth-piece. They smoked deliberately, inhaling deep, despite the foulness of the tobacco. It was odd how like it was to the smoking of condemned men in their cells, before they go out to the courtyard and the gallows.

They did nothing apart from that, and said nothing. They carefully avoided one another's eyes. The Chairman looked up into the ceiling, then down at the table before him. The psalm-singers were more numerous now. There were four, perhaps five, but you could not tell whether the fifth was singing psalms, or adapting the traditional sing-song to words of his own. The man at the phantom typewriter tapped away desperately. Many minutes passed by thus, twenty, thirty minutes, and it seemed several hours.



*For the enemy hath persecuted my soul ; he hath smitten my life down to the ground : he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead.*

*Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me ; my heart within me is desolate.*

*I stretch forth my hands unto thee : my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land.*

So they sang, the doomed men, and their voices were like wind moving, and like water flowing. And wind moves no longer, and water is dispersed into the desert places, but the heart still hears the sound of them.

Until at last a voice was heard, not one of their own voices, nor of one of the S.S. men ; nor was it the Secretary's, for it came from the outer regions of the Community House towards the street entrance. The voice came closer slowly, till at length you heard the words it uttered :

"Make way, Jews ! Make way for the Great Miraculous One ! Shush ! Sha ! Sha !" the voice went, as if there was a great shooing out of the way of an importunate throng.

The councillors lifted their heads. "Who can that be ?" their eyes asked. But they all knew, not only the two or three among them who were Chassidic Jews, for they had either heard that voice or the rumour of it during their residence in the Ghetto. They all knew, whether they were Zionists or Communists, Orthodox Jews, Socialists or Freethinkers. "That is the *Bocher*, Reb Yizchok," they whispered to one another, "the chief disciple of the Wonder-Rabbi of Semienka. And is the Wonder-Rabbi with him," they asked, "as the *Bocher* says ?" They looked up towards the S.S. men in terror. Had they already got their cudgels out of the thongs or their fingers on the trigger ? They had not. (This is the report of the single councillor who survived the events of that day. He was one of the Chassidim, the believers in the Wonder-Rabbi's miraculousness. Miracles went before, he implied, like the light of the sun on the western tops, while he is still hidden by the eastern ranges.) The S.S. men stood unbudging, as they stood throughout the episode that now followed. There seemed to be a spell on them, against which they fought, but in vain. The eyeballs protruded, criss-crossed with red veins. Their hands were knobbly and bunched-up, like woody pustules on trees.

Yes, the Wonder-Rabbi was with him, but as always the chief *Bocher* went before. "Make way, Jews !" he cried. "Shush ! Sha ! Sha !" shooing away the suppliants. But there were no suppliants. The *Bocher* just went through the motions. If this was the way a Chassidic *Bocher* walked ahead of his Rabbi, ever since the days of the great Baal Shem Tov, the Prodigious One, he, Reb Yizchok Perlmutter, First *Bocher* to the Great Miraculous Rabbi of Semienka, saw no reason to be diverted from tradition by the



fact that there was a new Haman, a new Titus, called Adolf Hitler, in temporary charge of events; that he had chosen to make war on Poles and Jews dwelling in the same land, as Nebuchadnezzar once had made war on Syrians and Jews dwelling in the same land. What if at the outbreak of this recent war among nations, the Great Miraculous One consented to exchange his Residence at Semienka for the comparative safety of the best suite of rooms in the best Warsaw hotel; what if, after much competition among the richest of the pious Jews of Warsaw for the extreme honour, he had then moved to a large apartment in the Jewish section; what if, as events developed, he had subsequently been moved on to four or five other apartments, each safer but shoddier than the one before . . . what difference could that make in the punctilio which governed attendance upon the Great Miraculous One? What if most recently the Residence had consisted of one basement room, with a trestle-bed in the kitchen hard by, for the first *Bocher*, the only disciple left of a once thriving religious entourage? What then? There would be no break with tradition. "Shush!" exclaimed young Reb Yizchok, "Sha!"—waving his hands to invisible crowds of petitioners as he went forth into the street.

The Great Miraculous Rabbi of Semienka went behind him. His name was Moishe Abraham Segelfinger, son of the great Samuel Segelfinger, who had been the Rabbi of Semienka before him, who had been the son of the very great Yizchok Saul Segelfinger of Semienka, whose grandfather had been the favourite pupil and first *Bocher* and successor designate of the great Baal Shem Tov himself. Ever since, every Rabbi Segelfinger of Semienka had been preceded on the occasion of his rare goings-forth by his own son, who was his first pupil, and designated to follow him after his death. There had been such a successor designate continuously since then. None of the Polish Jew-butchers had managed to slay the heir designate to the Semienka see; nor any of the Little Muscovite Fathers, the Alexanders and Nicholases, as they sat in their turn each for a little while on the Russian throne. Why, in the lifetime of this same Great Miraculous Moishe Abraham Segelfinger, not during the pogroms of eighteen hundred and eighty-four; nor during the nineteen hundred and five pogroms that were organized to distract attention from Nicholas the Second's defeats in the Far East; nor again in nineteen hundred and nineteen, when the bandit, Petlura, armed from Odessa by the Western Democracies, ravaged the Jewish Pale with fire and sword—not even during these more modern and scientific pogroms had anyone managed to lay a finger on the sacred persons of the Semienka dynasty.

And now, in nineteen hundred and forty-three, where was Rabbi Moishe Abraham's son, his chief *Bocher*? The Great Miraculous One smiled wanly and remotely above the fine white cascade of his beard. They told him that



his son, and his son's wife, and his grandson, and his other grandchildren, had gone to America, the opportunity presenting itself so suddenly there had been no time for farewells. He let them believe that he believed them. As if they did not know that he knew!

Either they still believed in the Miraculous Insight, or they did not. If they did, why were they trying to deceive him? Months ago now, he had refused food and sleep, he had prayed night and day, night and day again, till the Insight came. His son and his son's kin were lying with many others in a deep pit, to the left of a road, between hills. He could make out quite clearly the large black beard of his son and heir designate. The head of his son's wife was missing. There was a child of theirs lying across their feet. Soil was above them, grass. That was all he saw; he was no longer very good at it; nor did details matter so very much, did they? He was tired of details, being a very old man.

How old? There had been a Disputation among the scholars of his *Yeshivah*, his Academy—when had it been?—before the last war or after? They had consulted the books as to his age, and had decided he was four hundred and ninety-nine years old then. That was his age and was to remain his age, officially. It did not matter. He was a very old man, anyway. He remembered that upheaval among the Gentiles in the year they called eighteen hundred and forty-eight in their way of measuring time; he had been a child then. He was now probably five score years old, or thereabouts.

"Make way for the Great Miraculous One!" cried his first and last *Bocher*, as he went from dwelling-place to dwelling-place, each one as irrelevant as the last or the next, until the next should be the courts of Heaven. The Miraculous One moved slowly, the almost transparent hand grasping the handle of his stick. He was still tall, very old though he was, and the shoulders stooping. He wore a fur cap, and a pale-blue dressing-gown lined with wool, and printed with forget-me-nots. His shoes were soft, embroidered with red leather. The pale-blue eyes had been failing him lately, their vision was turned inward most of the time, not outward on the passing events of an irrelevant outward world.

The Great Miraculous One had not been receiving petitioners at his Residences lately. He was not unhappy about that. When he was young, he had been a great stickler for ceremonial; now he smiled at it indulgently, as he smiled at everything else, including this zealous new little *Bocher* of his, who raised such an outcry over every violation of the Semienka court punctilio. He had not at all disliked the migration from Residence to Residence. The out-of-doors air was agreeable. And, of course, it was not dangerous for the Miraculous One, as it had been for the lesser Rabbis. For the wrath of the heathen had raged against those others exceedingly.



Worship in synagogues had been summarily forbidden. The synagogues had been burned, or, worse than that, they had been befouled, converted into stables or brothels. The Scrolls of the Law had been trampled into the mire. There had been much glee among the heathen in the shaming of Rabbis; they had made them dance in the street, clasp the Scrolls of the Law, with their phylacteries and praying-shawls flying about them. They had delighted in tearing out the living beard from its roots, and branding a swastika upon the crowns of their heads. Then, at last, they had taken them away, as cats take mice away, to extract from them the last ounce of entertainment in the Gestapo cellars.

But these things did not happen to the Great Miraculous One, whether, as his followers said, because he had Powers, or whether, as the worldly-minded said, he was a valuable asset to the whole Ghetto. He was safer, they said, among the Gestapo than the great bosses, Ashkenazi or Wildstein, Kahn or the others. Every Gestapo man was palmed on his behalf by half the Jewish Community, all the poor and those who still managed to be rich. Not that he had anything to do with these transactions. It was the *Bocher* who looked after all that, all the material side of things: the admission or refusal of petitioners, while he still held court, petitioners eastern or western seeking advice in matters religious, matrimonial, academic, commercial even. The *Bocher* accepted the gifts, assessed the fees, paid out alms to these and bribes to those.

It was the *Bocher* who looked after these things, under the aegis of Yacki Kahn. For, in the last resort, the Great Miraculous One was the special perquisite of Yacki, spiritual as well as financial. He was one of his most golden rackets. The Miraculous One needed protection? Who better qualified to bestow it than Herr Kahn? But there were two sorts of graft to be extracted from the protection of the Miraculous One. After all, would it not be inscribed to his credit in the great books Up There that Yacki Kahn had looked after the Wonder-Rabbi like his own son-in-law? For whatever his enemies might say to the contrary, deep down Yacki Kahn was a good Jew. No one wept more loudly or beat his bosom more forcibly than Yacki during the Day of Atonement services, as celebrated deep in the catacombs of the Ghetto, in the teeth of the explicit and angry prohibitions of the German overlords.

So the Great Miraculous One, preceded by his *Bocher*, set forth that day from his last recorded Residence towards the Council House.

"Shush! Sha! Make way!" cried the *Bocher*, even now listening to a request here, accepting a little gift there, shooing the children from about his feet. There were S.S. men and Gestapo men to pass on the way, but these might have been hundreds of miles off in the Thüringerwald or the Spreewald, for all the awareness they showed of the cortège. There were



Jewish policemen to pass, and the hearts of these turned sick inside them with grief and shame. It was only Reb Leib ben Feivel, an orthodox Rabbi now turned brush-maker by the stress of events, who turned his eyes away with displeasure; the feud between the Chassidim and the Orthodox Jews was of a few hundred years' standing, and it was not to be expected that even an event like the emergence of an Adolf Hitler would violently affect it.

"Shush! Sha!" exclaimed Reb Yizchok, the *Bocher*, shooing away the non-existent petitioners, as he crossed the threshold of the Council Chamber in the Community House.

"And is the Wonder-Rabbi with him?" asked the councillors fearfully.

Yes, the Wonder-Rabbi was with him, following slowly behind, as always, his hand grasping the handle of his stick, his pale-blue dressing-gown clearing the ground behind him as he moved. The councillors looked up to the S.S. men, but these were immobile, as if a spell was on them. Then they looked again towards the Wonder-Rabbi, or rather their eyes were swung round towards his eyes, as if a spell controlled them, too.

The old man's eyes were not as they usually were, withdrawn, gazing inward, towards matters not of this world. They gazed outward, towards the councillors assembled there, seeming to compass all their eyes in one glance. His eyes were understanding and they were pitiful; they were shrewd; there was even a glint of humour in them. And yet they were reproachful, there was anger in them.

The reporter of this episode could not assert definitely that the old man spoke, though certain actual words and sentences had made so profound an impression on him. He could not say the tongue had uttered them or that they were conveyed by some other agency. The old man did not sit down, he thought. As he stood there, he seemed to become taller; the shoulders seemed to straighten out. He seemed to become no older than his own son had been, the one-time Chief *Bocher*, the heir designate, who now lay in a mass grave to the left of a road, between hills. He seemed to be at once old and young, like his own people, of whom no one has been able to decide, neither their enemies nor their friends nor they themselves, whether, being so old, it is time they should at last lie down and die, or, being so young, they still have much of their history before them.

But the burden of the message conveyed to the councillors, said the survivor, was quite clear. And this was the substance of it. And it was the substance of the thoughts in the minds of many men and women making their preparations that day, in the cellars of the Warsaw Ghetto, for the imminent battle. As it was that same day in the minds of other men and



women in other Ghettoes of the General Government; and in the minds of Jewish soldiers and sailors and airmen fighting the same enemy in the armies, and in the naval and aerial fleets, already drawn up in battle. As it had been among Jewish fighters fighting in the last war, and in many wars. As it had been in Kishinev once, and in Toledo once, and on the hill-top of Masada, beleaguered by the men of Titus. The accidents were different; the essence was the same.

"It cannot be, Jews. It shall not be," said the Great Miraculous One, the Wonder-Rabbi of Semienka. "It was not for this that the Jews have lived since the time of the birth of angels, that they should die now, in your death. The death of a brave man is a thing that is, and is not a moment later; like a tree gripped in a wind. The wind blows no longer, and the tree is as before, fast to its roots. But the death of a coward is a thing that is for all time, like chaff burned in a fire.

"It shall not be, Jews. Ye are of the people that know the Word to be more powerful than the Sword. For you who have lived by the Word have endured by it, and the heathen that have lived by the Sword have fallen by it. But well ye know that, once in a thousand or two thousand years, the Word takes to itself the substance and the aspect of the sword, and the sword is the morning prayer and the midday prayer and the evening prayer, the prayer for the breaking of bread and the prayer for the drinking of wine.

"And today that day has come again. Be of good heart, Jews, that, dying, you may not die."

That was the import of the words, the survivor said, uttered, or not uttered, by the Wonder-Rabbi of Semienka; then he turned, and the *Bocher* took up his place before him, exclaiming: "Shush! Sha! Make way, Jews!" And the young man and the old man went out into the passages of the Community House, and so out into the street again; and thence to his Residence in the deep cellars of Warsaw, the last court the Rabbi held in Poland, or anywhere on earth, and the most glorious, lit up as it was by the light of the Shechinah, with angels going round about it, as the pious said who made their reverences there, during the time of the shelling guns and the bombing aeroplanes that now was so close at hand.

## II

It was about an hour after Avrom Godol, the Secretary, had left the Council Chamber to go to his own office that one of the councillors,



Sylman was his name, suddenly raised his head and cried out sharply: "Avrom Godol, the Secretary, where is he?"

Nobody replied. They all knew that Avrom Godol had gone to his office, for they themselves had sent him there. They probably all knew what had happened to Godol by this time. At the moment when this Sylman raised his voice, it is certain that no Wonder-Rabbi and no *Bocher* were present in the Council Chamber, if they had ever been there.

"I want to know," said Sylman. He looked round quite truculently. He had not said a word till now throughout the deliberations. He seemed almost like a new man who had just come among them for the first time, like a new creature born out of ashes.

Everybody looked towards Herr Padower, the Chairman. After all, the meeting had not been closed, the Council was still in session.

"Herr Sylman knows quite well." The Chairman sounded a little peeved. "The Secretary was requested to withdraw for the performance of his customary task. He was requested, not by the Chairman, it will be remembered, but by the Chairman speaking for the Council."

No one made an observation. There was complete silence in the Chamber, except for a restive shuffling from the S.S. men. The Sergeant's cheeks were beginning to puff out. German though he was, he seemed to be reaching the limit of his not absolutely inexhaustible patience. The Jew-pigs were making too much of a meal of their stinking meeting. But he did nothing, said nothing. A German understands discipline. He has orders.

Even the psalm-singers were silent. There was death here, and death there, death hard by and far off, death in the gutters, in the cellars, in the attics. But death was not everywhere, no, not everywhere in the whole universe, in the height and the depth thereof.

Herr Sylman, without further shilly-shallying, came straight to his point.

"I request your permission, Mr. Chairman, and the permission of the Council, to seek out Avrom Godol in his office. I suggest that he takes up his accustomed place in this Chamber, so that the Council reopen consideration of the task that has been assigned him."

"Is that a motion, Herr Sylman?" asked the Chairman.

It was.

"Is it seconded?"

A man rose to his feet. It was the one with the straggly red beard and the pale-blue eyes, Kazuch.

The motion was seconded. It was carried. Sylman rose to his feet, and looked into the Chairman's eyes.

"If it's not too late!" he cried, in loud clear tones.

Herr Padower flushed burning red.



"Herr Sylman's request is granted," he said. Sylman walked with a firm step towards the door by which Avrom Godol had left earlier. The S.S. Sergeant stood in the way as before. Sylman faced him, staring eye to eye. The confrontation lasted several seconds. At length the Sergeant moved to one side. Perhaps it was in that moment the Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto was won, whatever the tally of deaths on this side and on that side.

## III

Avrom Godol, the little Secretary, entered his office and looked around. It was a large and well-equipped office; there was Godol's own desk and the desk of a clerk he used to have, though he did not need one now; there were also the index-files of half a million people, and more. The filing-cabinet had not been removed, for it was quite on the cards that some day in the future as large a multitude of Jews would once more be shovelled into the Warsaw Ghetto, when the present inhabitants had been disposed of. The filing-cabinets were there, but there were far fewer entries, some forty thousand or less, tabulated according to house-blocks and streets.

Avrom Godol went over to the side of the room where the filing-cabinets still in use stood. I might as well get down to the job, he told himself. He knew quite well he would not finish it, but he was a creature of routine, and there was a certain amount of automatic impetus in him that was discharging itself.

He stood for a moment at the cabinets. Which drawer was he to pull out—A-K, K-P, P-Z? Looking at the letters thus, his brain somehow failed to associate them with the names of the streets they initiated. He went over to the wall near his desk, to consult the map of the Ghetto helpfully supplied by the governing authorities. The Ghetto was a good deal more constricted now than it was in the days when it went all the way southward to Zlota Street. The successive modifications were marked in red ink. There were several rather untidy areas where over-passes and under-passes were created, revoked, created again.

Godol pushed back his spectacles and fixed his eyes on the northern streets. That was where folk were now. *Lubeckiego*, he read. Yes. *Zamenhofa*. He himself lived in *Zamenhofa*, with his daughter, who worked in a leather factory in *Franciskanska*. So, of course, when he went over to the filing-cabinet, he would not pull out the P-Z drawer, he would draw out the K-P drawer, where *Lubeckiego* was. Did he know anybody in *Lubeckiego*? Of course he did. Quite a number of people. There was that nice little Frenchman, for instance, André Rainier, from Paris; the rue Byron, behind the Champs Elysées. He came from a fine family, they had



a fine apartment. He was rather a dilettante, he used to translate novels from the English, though he did not need the money. He was awfully frightened all the time. He, Godol, used to try and make the lad feel better. André Rainier and Godol's daughter, Henkah, had met quite a few times.

Godol did not see how he could pull the K-P drawer, and with his own hand push the lad into the death-train. Well, then. The A-K drawer. Did he recall a street in the A-K section? Did he? Somehow, that was not so easy. Stawki, Mila, Nila, Muranowski, Nalewki. Odd. He could not recall a single A to K street. Krochmalna? Of course not. That was way beyond the present confines of the Ghetto. A to K? A to K? He suddenly found he had a headache. His temples were throbbing. What call had he to give himself a headache looking for a street of which the initial was between A and K? It was ridiculous. And when he found it, what would he do with it? Sentence it to death, herd it into the lime-caked trucks. A fine business, yes?

It was ridiculous he should give himself a headache like this. He went to his desk and pulled out the drawer where he kept the stationery oddments, package of clips, boxes of pins, a phial of gloy, of typewriter oil, a typewriter ribbon. There was a small phial among these oddments which looked like nothing at all, but it contained prussic acid. It had always seemed to Avrom Godol a good place to keep it. The Gestapo had tooth-combed his office a dozen times and more, but they had never looked twice at the little phial of prussic acid. He uncorked it, and drained the phial. It was an unpleasant death, of course.

#### IV

It was about thirty or thirty-five minutes later that David Sylman went up, at the request of the Jewish Council, to recall the Secretary to the Council Chamber. The door was not locked, for the Secretary had deliberately not locked it; he had not wished to complicate matters.

David Sylman entered, and found the little Secretary contorted and rigid on the floor. He was not surprised. He had expected to find exactly this thing. He was certain the Council would not be surprised, either; after all, it was they who had condemned him to his death.

Sylman withdrew, walked down the stairs, and along the passage back to the Council Chamber. He made no verbal announcement to the assembled councillors. Instead, he faced the S.S. Sergeant and slapped him hard on the cheek. For some seconds nothing happened, nothing at all. The Sergeant stared as if some apparition from another world had arisen out of the ground before his feet. The two S.S. men stared with eyes and mouth



so large and round and protrusive, they were almost laughable. A few of the councillors sharply jerked their heads away and hid their faces with their hands. The others stared with eyes and mouth large, round, protrusive, like the S.S. men's.

It was there that something first happened, in the staring eyes of those Jews. Exultation blazed up in them like a bonfire.

Then the Sergeant came to his senses. He landed a deft, tremendous kick in Sylman's private parts. Sylman uttered a deep groan and fell to the ground.

"Get them!" the Sergeant bellowed. "Rub them up! Kill them!" Then he raised his whistle to his lips. A moment or two later half a dozen S.S. men, a dozen, were among the councillors, rubbing them up, smashing their teeth out, pulling the beards out with large raw chunks of flesh attached.

As for David Sylman, by tacit consent and natural tact, the privates left him to the Sergeant. The Sergeant kicked and kicked, and again kicked and kicked, and again kicked and kicked, till all the ribs were staved in, the belly, the face, were a quite indistinguishable mush.

When he desisted, it was a signal for the men to desist, too. The survivors were dragged off to the cellars under Gestapo House.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### I

THE scene reverts to the apartment of Leon Ashkenazi. Kurt, the Hitler-jugend lad, has left for Gestapo House with his envelope. The young Ashkenazi daughter, Ruth, has come down the passage towards her father, sitting in the big wooden chair by the hall-stand. Her hair is shining black and her eyes dull jet.

"Come, daddy," she says. "You should finish that egg. Whatever there is tomorrow, there's a fresh egg today. Come, daddy!" She slipped her hand into her father's. Ashkenazi rose. "How cold your hand is!" she said. She took her other hand to it, and tried to chafe some warmth into it, but without success. They came back into the dining-room again, and sat down at their places.

"Your egg," moaned Frau Ashkenazi. "It will be like a stone!" She made a great misfortune out of practically anything; it was certainly an unfortunate thing, at that time, to let an egg go like a stone. "Sit down! Sit down!" she implored. Ashkenazi sat down, and shivered.



rather, as if he were trying to get the chill out of his system. The girl, Ruth, sat down again, though she had finished her meal. Her elder brother, Boris, had finished, too. It wasn't really a big meal, except in comparison with the meals nearly every other Jew had eaten that day in the Ghetto. Ruth and Boris sat on. They were both working in one of the factories that Ashkenazi had a finger in, but being Ashkenazis they were a little casual about attendance. They sat on, for their father liked to make quite a musical affair out of the family blessing-after-meals. He was very punctilious about that sort of thing, and had even had ideas about making a little private synagogue out of one of the sitting-rooms. With himself and his son making two of the *minyon*, the quorum of ten indispensable for worship, it should have been quite easy to have a weekday service at home fairly often and the Sabbath services of Friday evening and Saturday morning quite regularly. It was in itself a nice high-class feudal thing to do, like a Herr Baron having a private chapel in his Schloss. And, of course, it would bring ease to the soul. That was the real point of it. The soul needed quite a lot of cosseting these days.

So Leon Ashkenazi had duly put the idea up to the Gestapo. He never moved a step without putting things up to the Gestapo. And naturally the Gestapo turned the idea down flat. Synagogues were forbidden—*Schluss!*—finish!—not only on doctrinal grounds but because you never know what political tricks a pack of Jews may get up to when they assemble at Jehovah's hearthstone. Drinking the blood of Christian babies is one thing, but secret short-wave transmitters hidden in Holy Arks is another. *Schluss!*

So Leon Ashkenazi had to put up with a purely family second-best, whenever it could be brought off. He was particularly partial to these blessings-after-meals, because, in any case, after meals is the time when you feel particularly grateful to the Lord for His blessings, which had been showered in exceptional abundance on the patrician head of Reb Aryeh. The blessings were rather a florid and protracted affair, almost Gregorian. Reb Aryeh liked the sound of his own voice, fluting in the upper register. The children sang well, too, with that clear articulation of every syllable so dear to the heart of every Jewish patriarch. Frau Ashkenazi did not sing well; she could not concentrate.

Ruth and Boris sat on, waiting for their father to finish his egg, waiting for the musical blessing that would come after. Their father was clearly put out by the interview he had just had with the young messenger. He raised his spoon and dug it into the boiled egg, which was flaky and brownish now; but he forgot about it, and it slid down into the saucer with a sharp tinkle. He reached for a slice of bread smeared with real butter; but that, too, did not get so far as his mouth.



"Aryeh, what is the matter with you?" his wife wailed. "Why don't you eat?"

"I don't want to eat," said Reb Aryeh sullenly. "Can't you be quiet?" He picked up his napkin and wiped his lips, though they were bone-dry. He sat on for some minutes. There was no conversation at the table. The parlour-maid kept away. She knew when the atmosphere was as tense as this, it was better to keep away. She dropped things, and Frau Ashkenazi made life hell for her.

"Daddy," said the daughter at last, "if you don't want to eat, perhaps you would like to *bensch*, to say the blessings? Boris and I should be going along soon." It was obvious in this brother-and-sister relationship, Ruth took the initiative, though Boris was six or seven years her senior. In the old days he had been something of a fop. He had devoted a good deal of attention, even of ingenuity, to his clothes, and now when he wasn't allowed to dress startlingly any more, the energy and zest for life seemed to have gone out of him. Even so, the tie he was wearing was quite a notable, even if a forlorn, gesture.

"Yes," Boris repeated. "Perhaps we should be going."

"*Bensch*?" said old Ashkenazi angrily. "Who says I want to *bensch*?" The Lord wasn't playing the game by Leon Ashkenazi, so why should Leon Ashkenazi play the game by the Lord?

"It will do you good," ventured his wife, as if prayer were a sort of stomach pill.

Reb Aryeh ignored her. So did her children. Practically everybody ignored her, excepting Ella, the parlour-maid. The company remained sunk in gloom and silence. At last Ruth got up from her chair, and went up behind her father. She stroked the sides of his forehead with her cool and silky fingers. He was usually amenable to Ruth's hands.

"What's the matter, daddy dear?" she whispered. "Anything wrong?"

"I don't like it," said her father. He seemed to be addressing himself rather than her.

"You shouldn't worry too much," Ruth said. "Perhaps it'll be all right."

"It won't be all right."

"What is it, daddy dear, if it isn't a business matter?"

"It isn't a business matter." He paused. "Is it? Maybe it is."

"What can it be, daddy dear?"

"He's coming tomorrow," he exploded suddenly.

"Oh?" The hands ceased in the stroking of the forehead. The child looked up for one moment, as if she were addressing herself directly to the Lord, who, in that house, was usually approached much more circuitously, along spirals of twisted melody. Then she lowered her eyes again. She



knew at once who "he" was. So did her brother and her mother, though they were not very intelligent people. "Very well," breathed Ruth, "he comes tomorrow," and her hands came down on her father's cheeks again.

Ashkenazi's hands reached upwards, caught hers, and thrust them away on either side.

"Leave me alone!" he snapped. "Haven't I enough on my mind?"

She stood there a few moments, her hands where he had thrust them. Her eyes were shut, as if she were communing with herself. Then she bent down and kissed her father's forehead, but most gently, so that he could hardly feel it.

"I'm sorry, daddy," she murmured. Her lips seemed to form the word "good-bye", but they emitted no sound. Her father went on looking glumly down on the table. Her mother had suddenly remembered the coffee that Ella had spilt on the plush table-cloth, and was wiping away fiercely with a duster. Ruth looked up towards her brother. He was, as ever, waiting for her eye. She nodded towards the door. Come! her glance said. She went into her bedroom and her brother followed her.

"The time's come," the girl said.

"What are you talking about?" Boris asked sulkily. He very much preferred not to believe it.

"The time's come that we've been talking about for so long. The fight will come tomorrow."

"I don't believe it. Nobody knows anything yet."

"You can stay behind, or you can come with me," said Ruth quietly. "Nobody's forcing you."

"It's your own mother and father," he pointed out.

"Nobody's got mothers and fathers any more, and no sons or daughters." She was too sad and wise for her years. "I'll be out of the house in exactly three minutes."

He knew that it was impossible for him to remain sane without her; if he *was* sane—he was not sure of that. He was only sure he was not clever.

"I'll have to go with you," he said.

"Come, then!"

"At once?"

"At once!"

"Without even saying good-bye to father and mother?"

"What good will that do?"

"And can't I pack anything to take away with me?"

"You'll find everything you want down there."

He stood there with hanging head for some moments.

"Very well, Ruth. I'm coming," he said at length.

"Good old Boris!" She smiled into his eyes. He felt that was worth



a great deal. He shambled after her along the passage, and out through the front door. He was holding her hand, as if she were several years his senior.

Ten, fifteen minutes later Leon Ashkenazi got up from the table. He wanted to talk things over with Ruth. She was the sensible one, much more sensible than his wife and son.

"Where's Ruth?" he asked.

"In her room, I suppose," said his wife. "Unless she's gone already. I thought I heard the front door close."

"Go and get her."

"Yes," said Frau Ashkenazi obediently. She rose and went to her daughter's room. Ruth was not there. She was not anywhere in the apartment. Boris had gone, too. Frau Ashkenazi returned. Her husband was sitting at his seat at the table again, staring before him.

"They've gone to the factory," she announced.

He made no observation.

"They've gone to the factory," she said more loudly.

"They can go to Hell," he said between his teeth. Really, he was very odd this afternoon. She wondered if he had a fever.

"Would you like an aspirin, dear?" she asked solicitously.

He brought his hand viciously down on the table.

"You can go to Hell, too!" he shouted.

There was nothing to do with him in these moods. She left him and tip-toed away to their bedroom. The hem-stitching was coming away from those pillows. She ought to do something about it, she thought.

Leon Ashkenazi felt very gloomy.

The world isn't coming to an end, he told himself.

That's where you're wrong, he countered. The world *is* coming to an end.

Just because Himmler has to make an official visit to Warsaw; what's the matter with you?

Don't make a fool of yourself. You've always known what would happen when he came a third time.

Well, what will happen?

You know very well. The death-trains will start moving out again.

What's that got to do with you, anyhow? It may be only a couple of thousand, maybe a couple of thousand more. Well? That doesn't mean you, Leon Ashkenazi. They can't do without you. Without you, everything will go to pieces. You'll be the very last man . . .

Yes, yes, sooner or later, there will be a last man. And if I've not gone already, then I'll be the last man. And then I'll go.



Always looking on the black side of things. You should be ashamed of yourself. Besides, how do you know he's really coming? All that's happened is that a snotty-nosed Hitlerjugend boy has come along with a message from that low-life, Wernicke, the stinking blackmailers, such a year upon them!

Well, control yourself, Aryeh. Just check up from Wernicke. Perhaps the little snotty-nose didn't give the right message.

You fool, you great big bearded fat-belly fool! Who do you think you're deceiving?

Well, suppose he *is* coming? Well, what can I do, in the meantime?

If I were you, Aryeh ben Feivel, I should go in to my wife, and ask her to pack a couple of nice small cases. Just in case you have to go on a visit somewhere, and you want a few things for convenience. Some money, and some jewellery, of course, and a bit of soap and a towel and a nightshirt. And the same for Malkeh. While she's doing that, you can go and find out. Ring up Wernicke from the Nowolipie shoe factory. Let him earn his money. There are one or two other people who'll answer questions.

He went to his wife.

"Malkeh," he told her, "I'm going out for half an hour, maybe. I've been thinking."

"Yes, Aryeh?" She lifted her eyes deferentially to her lord and master. She was an old-fashioned Jewish wife.

"Things are getting a bit easier in the Ghetto."

"Yes?" She had not noticed it particularly, but if he said so it must be true.

"Maybe the authorities wouldn't mind if we left the Ghetto. They let me go out for a whole day—why not two or three days?"

"That would be wonderful!" she sighed wistfully. "We would go to a nice country place, on the river, maybe?"

"I don't know if they'd let Ruth and Boris come, too. I'd tell them if Ruth and Boris don't come, I won't go myself."

"And Ella?"

"Ella can stay behind."

"Yes. Ella can stay behind. She's more trouble than she's worth. Besides, she can look after things here."

"Yes, Malkeh. So while I've gone I'd like you to pack a couple of small cases, those nice little leather ones, fitted up. You know, like for a week-end. But it would be better to put some of the jewellery in. You know, the nice little things that it's easy to carry."

She almost clapped her hands with pleasure.

"Yes, Aryeh. I understand. I'll do it all myself. I won't let Ella help. She'll only spoil things."



"Very good, Malkeh. I'm going now. I won't be long." He reached for his flattened bowler hat, and put it on. "Half an hour, maybe an hour. So long, Malkeh."

"Bye-bye, Aryeh."

They were almost in good spirits again, both of them.

He walked along to his shoe factory in Nowolipie, where he did his telephoning. The authorities would no more let him have a private telephone than a private synagogue, and for much the same reasons. But, of course, the various Nazi departments of manufacture and supply had to maintain contact with their Ghetto factories and warehouses, both from inside and outside the Wall. The telephones were carefully supervised, of course.

He got through to the telephone-exchange at Gestapo House. It was the voice of one of the youths who answered, and instead of ringing off, Ashkenazi suddenly made up his mind to ask for Herr Müller himself. "Tell him it's Herr Pepedick!" he said, giving the telephone alias arranged between himself and Müller. Müller was in conference. Ashkenazi rang off, and summoned the manager of the factory. The manager was in trouble. Quite a number of his workmen had dispersed during the course of the day; it was certain he was not going to turn in his prescribed quota by evening. Ashkenazi eyed him shrewdly.

"Have you heard anything?" he asked.

The manager stared at him for some moments. Quite unaccountably he seemed to take umbrage at the question. With a rudeness unusual in him, he turned and walked off. Ashkenazi spent some twenty minutes among the office papers, though he found it quite impossible to concentrate. He thought by this time Wernicke must have finished washing his hands, or whatever it was, and he rang up Gestapo House again. Yes, it was the voice of Wernicke that came through from the exchange this time.

"Is that you, Wernicke?"

"Yes. Who's that?" The voice was suspicious.

"*Zweimal*," he replied. There had to be telephone aliases all round.

"Is that true?"

"Yes."

"Beat it!" came the voice of Wernicke. The telephone receiver clicked. Ashkenazi's cheeks flared furiously. He seized the telephone again, as if the telephone itself had been rude to him, and demanded to be connected once more. Once more the voice of Wernicke came through to him.

"This is Herr Ashkenazi," he stormed. "I want to report you for impertinence. Put me through at once to——" Then the valour within him flickered like an electric bulb on the point of going out. An instant later



it was out. He was sweating profusely. He replaced the receiver very quietly and crept out of the room.

There was no point in hanging round the factory. He went out into Nowolipie, and turned into Karmelicka. There were one or two other people who ought to be in the know by now; he would have a word with them. He walked up the street and turned left into Nowolipki, then he turned left into Smocza, then he turned and walked along Nowolipie again. He had walked round the whole block. How empty the streets were, no lorries, no carts, no rickshas, even—just one or two Gestapo cars prowling around. He walked round the block.

A second and a third time. Each time it was with a start of surprise he found himself outside the doors of his own factory. The third time he went in. His throat was dry as a lime-kiln. He would get someone to make him a cup of coffee, foul though it would be.

The manager came up.

"Yes?" he wanted to know. His manner was quite short.

Ashkenazi was conscious of a faint flicker of resentment. The fellow had never dared to be anything but respectful, even obsequious, before. Oh, he felt too sick and dizzy to do anything about it. Later, tomorrow, he would give him a good dressing-down. He would take his papers from him. Then he would see. The next time they started making up the trains— His mind shied like a horse.

"Can you get someone to make me some coffee?" asked Ashkenazi, as if it were a tremendous favour.

"Yes," said the fellow, and walked off.

But he did nothing about it. Nothing happened. Ashkenazi sat around the place for half an hour, an hour, as if he were an out-of-work waiting for the chance of a job as cleaner or night-watchman. He got up at last. They could do what they liked with their coffee. He would go home and Malkeh would make him some really nice coffee; he wondered if she had some of those real beans left to mix with the ersatz paste. It would make it smell of something. He felt quite a gust of affection for Malkeh.

He went out into the street and set off towards his home. The afternoon was getting on. There were still not many people around in the streets, but the S.S. men were beginning to come together in little groups. They were standing about at corners and in doorways. It looked as if something was going to happen. But not, of course, to Leon Ashkenazi. They all knew Leon Ashkenazi. They didn't quite salute him, of course, for he was a Jew, but they knew him and drew back respectfully. He bowed towards them graciously. They, at least, knew who was who, and what was what.

He still had not made up his mind, even while climbing up the stairs



to his apartment, exactly what he proposed to do. He still had some property in outer Warsaw. He had had to give away most of it in bribes, but there was still something left. Perhaps, in these special circumstances, the Gestapo would let him occupy a room or two in his own property. They let him move freely about the streets, wearing the Jew-emblem, of course, for his own protection. For, after all, he looked like a Jew. There was no getting away from that. But that was not all the protection he had. Oh no. Not Leon Ashkenazi. So perhaps they would let him stay out overnight somewhere for a little time, till the Visitor had left. He didn't think they would let him go to a country inn on the river, that would be too much to expect. But out there, in the property he still had on Ulanska . . . not in his own name, of course . . .

He would have his coffee first, and think it all out.

He found his wife, Malkeh, too busy to make him coffee. She was very busy, indeed. She had been busy for some hours now.

Of course she could not have said when the panic first seized her. But she had known what it was all about from the beginning; she was no fool. She had known that the dreadful one, the appalling one, was coming to Warsaw tomorrow. And that that would be the signal for the death-trains to start again. Of course, that was a matter of no importance to the Ashkenazis really. The Ashkenazis always had an S.S. guard outside their building, when it looked like trouble. And no one would dream of rounding up the Ashkenazis and shoving them into one of those trains.

So what was Aryeh looking so worried about, the dear silly thing? Why had he asked her to pack up those two small cases? Well, just in case. Just in case of what? You know, in case it would be a good thing to be away somewhere for a day or two, maybe in the country; there would be eggs and cream, maybe, and butter. If the children could come, too, it would do them all the good in the world, some nice country food and fresh air.

But two small cases wouldn't be enough, certainly not for all four of them. Just like a man, she smiled indulgently.

"Get out the trunks, Ella!" she cried suddenly and raucously. You could have heard her half-way down the block. Ella appeared red-eyed from her cubby-hole, and with enormous grunting and groaning, pushed the trunks into the passage. "In here!" Frau Ashkenazi requested, meaning the bedroom, where most of their clothes were. Ella pushed and shoved. "No!" Frau Ashkenazi changed her mind. "Leave them in the passage! They'll only have to go out again!"

Then the packing started. They were both in a state of hysteria in twenty minutes. Sheets, pillow-slips? Of course. Do you expect people



to provide you with linen as well, these days? Suits, frocks? So you'd leave your suits and frocks behind, maybe? They're so easy to get, eh? The clocks, the plush table-cloth, the cushions? You can't live in a barracks, can you? A place has got to look like home, or why not stay behind, after all? Then the things in the larder—the bags of flour, the tins of soups, of vegetables, of sardines, of corned beef, that you've collected with such infinite patience and at such enormous expense . . . what sort of an idiot are you going to be to leave things like that behind?

Before long the place was pandemonium. Both women were screeching around the place like railway-engines, weeping, yelling, packing, unpacking, not this trunk, that trunk, what's the good of an electric iron, if there's no electricity, mind your own business, Ella, God in Heaven, she's spilled the tin of paprika, they're my shoes, they're not your shoes, I only lent them you.

They both collapsed suddenly, instantaneously. Each dragged herself off to her bed, and lay there, gasping like a stranded fish. Half an hour later Frau Ashkenazi dragged herself to her feet again, and managed to crawl over to Ella's bed. There was no shifting Ella. She was like something clamped to the wall. Now and again she moaned. That was all you could get out of Ella.

Frau Ashkenazi dragged herself back to the trunks again. She was like a hamstrung animal. She lifted things out of trunks, dropped them back again, stood for minutes at a time holding something idiotic in her hand, let it fall, hung over a trunk and started beating it with her fists, as if it were a pillow.

That was the state of things Herr Ashkenazi found in his apartment when he returned. His wife was certainly incapable of making him that cup of coffee. He, of course, forgot about it at once.

He was angry. He had never in all his life been so angry before. He let himself go.

"You lump of ox!" he stormed. "Have you one grain of sense in your fat head? Did I tell you we're going to move house? I said two small cases, ox-lump! Get out of my way!" His teeth were positively grinding in his fury. His beautiful black beard was all over the place. "Get out!" He pushed her away, and hurled himself into the nearest trunk. "Candlesticks!" he yelled. "So we want candlesticks!" He pulled out the lovely brass candlesticks with which she blessed the white sanctity of the Sabbath eve, standing with a kerchief over her head. He flung them down the passage, where they fell with a dull thud like the explosion of a far gun. "Maybe you've put in some firewood, too, yes? And the sink from the kitchen?" Here was a couple of vases, here was that electric iron. He flung them after the candlesticks. "I leave her alone for a moment, she behaves like a



Golem! Where are those small cases, where?" He wanted an answer to that question. "Where are those small cases, where?"

There was no answer to that question. He looked round towards her, determined there should be one. She was standing a couple of yards away, nursing that electric iron as if it were a baby. He saw a quite dangerous gleam in her eyes. He realized that if he didn't control himself and her, she would go crazy, if she wasn't crazy already. She was saying something; about that electric iron.

"I'm taking it, I tell you. I won't leave it behind for *her*. She's always had her eye on it. I'm taking it, I'm taking it."

"Of course, Malkeh, of course. Who says you shouldn't take your electric iron? Such a year on her before she gets it." He must handle her very carefully, he must humour her. He knew it would be quite impossible to get away with only the two small hand-cases packed. Well, let there be two valises. But, God in Heaven, not trunks, not three trunks, two wood boxes, four leather suitcases. "For the present, Malkeh," he went on, "we will pack these two valises. They're quite big, see? They can take a great deal. And they're nice fibre, not heavy leather, see? If the worst comes to the worst, we can carry them ourselves. Later on, if we don't come back ourselves, the children can pick up the trunks in one of our lorries. Give me a hand, Malkeh dear, yes? What would I do without you, Malkeh?"

She was very good and helpful. After all, she had her electric iron. She insisted on putting in two or three other useless bits of junk, and he thought it better not to argue with her. By the time they had finished, the two valises were quite heavy. But they were easier to manage than those trunks would have been, and those wooden boxes. They forgot to say good-bye to Ella, but Ella did not forget them.

"Good-bye, Herr and Frau Ashkenazi!" she called out after them. She roared with laughter. She was like a hyena, hooting and cackling.

"A cholera should take her!" said Frau Ashkenazi. "Of course I can carry it, give it me!"

It was as much as they could do to stagger out of the place with their cases, down the stairs, and out into the street.

Everything started beautifully. Just as they got on to the pavement they saw a lorry coming up along Solna Street. What was more, Herr Ashkenazi knew the driver. The fellow had been useful to him once or twice, and the other way round, of course.

Ashkenazi made signs.

"Fischer!" he called out. "Fischer!"

The young man stopped.



"Yes, Herr?"

"Can you give me a lift, Fischer, me and my wife?"

The young man hesitated for the fraction of a second, hardly more. After all, this was the Great Ashkenazi, the Jew with a finger in every pie. There could be no harm in giving the great Ashkenazi a lift.

"Where are you going?"

That was odd. Ashkenazi hadn't even at this late moment made up his mind where he was going. Out of the Ghetto, anyhow. The nearest Ghetto gate was at Chlodno.

"The gate at Chlodno!" he said.

"That's fine," said Fischer. "Just where I'm going. Jump in!" He helped with the two valises. Quite a nice young man.

But that was about all the good luck they had. They had to dismount, of course, at the Chlodno gate. Their suitcases were dumped beside them.

"Sorry I can't hang about!" said Fischer, and drove on.

"Papers!" said the guards.

"Don't you know who I am?" asked Ashkenazi. The guards were doubled, as a matter of fact. There were several he did not recognize. He turned to the posse of Jewish policemen. "Tell them!" he requested.

"Doesn't matter if you're President Rosenfeld himself," said the guard. He was by way of being a wit. "Nobody to leave the Ghetto from now on."

Ashkenazi spluttered a moment or two. He fingered the gold cigarette-case in his pocket. But that was impracticable, altogether too public.

"What shall I do?" he asked a little piteously. "They're expecting us!" His wife with quick eyes was following the conversation from mouth to mouth, almost as if she were lip-reading.

"They're expecting you, eh?" The guard stared at him mockingly. Then he switched heavily round. "Try the next gate!" he growled. He'd finished with the matter.

"Yes, of course, the next gate," stammered Ashkenazi. He was acutely embarrassed. He was not used to being treated like this by the ragtag and bobtail. His collar felt extremely sticky. The German guards were grinning like cats. The Jewish guards didn't quite know how to handle the situation. It was rather as if a tree that had seemed big and strong and deeply rooted was turning out to be all rotten inside.

The next gate. Well, which was the next gate? He would rather go to a gate southward, of course. That would lead you into the part of the town where you might pick up some sort of a conveyance. Down there, south and west, lay that property of his on Ulanska. But that was an awful long way off. It might be a bit of a job getting there. The nearest gate north was on Leszno, only a couple of blocks away. He turned to the group of guards.



"Perhaps somebody will help us to the gate on Leszno," he said. "Our bags are heavy." Nobody said a word for some moments. Then a Jewish policeman spoke up. He addressed the Unterscharführer, the corporal.

"Is that all right, corporal?"

The corporal shrugged his shoulders. He did not say No, at least.

"I'll give you a hand," said the Jewish policeman. He took hold of the two cases; they were heavy, even for him. Within half a block of the Leszno gate he stopped and put the cases down.

"Well?" he asked, and put out his hand. That was how that business started. Without a word Ashkenazi took out his wallet and handed over a note. The policeman picked up the bags, went as far as the gate, then left them.

It was exactly the same at the Leszno gate as it had been at the Chlodno gate. With greater difficulty, for it was a lot further, they got to the cemetery gate, on Gesia. It was exactly the same at the Gesia gate as it had been at the two other gates, though here a large gang of Jews was being passed through under guard from outside. So at length Ashkenazi surrendered. It was easy enough to get in, he saw. It was quite hopeless to think of getting out. The Ghetto was where he belonged. And that is where I will die, said Leon Ashkenazi.

Leon Ashkenazi turned his face eastward, as Jews had done three times a day for nearly two thousand years. But it was not so far East as Zion that his heart turned; in fact, only a mile away, across a distance of four or five blocks, to the slum street called Nalewki, where he had a fair amount of property.

He did not belong among the *goyim*; he realized that at last. He had worked for them like ten men, but they had turned him down in the end. Once a Jew, always a Jew. He was going back to Nalewki, to be among his own people. In his nostrils was the smell of Jewish dishes, the dishes he had eaten in his boyhood, salt herring and boiled potatoes, chopped and fried fish, meat stewed in a sweet-and-sour sauce, and the sweet pudding of prunes and carrots. He was a little confused, of course. The Jews would not be eating those dishes in the noisome warrens of Nalewki, where, in fact, a potato was a luxury and bread a dream. But those were the smells that were in his nostrils; and in his ears was the sound of the jolly rondels that Jews sing on the nights of *seder*, in the Passover time; and small boys turning their rattles in the synagogue at each mention of Haman during the reading of the Book of Esther. Those were the sounds and smells he would go back to among his own people in Nalewki. What if Haman had come among them again, the snake-eyed, chubby-cheeked, spectacled monster? The Jews of Nalewki would fight. He knew. Nobody



pulled wool over the eyes of Leon Ashkenazi. He knew of the rifles they had stocked down there, the pistols, the revolvers, the heavy and light machine-guns, the grenades. He had made a pretty penny out of them from time to time, though they were not his speciality. The Jews would fight. He would fight with them.

"Come, Malkeh!" he said, stumbling over his bag, and he set his face towards Nalewki.

"I can't!" his wife moaned. "I can't lift it! I can't carry it! I want to go home!" she said.

"We are going home," he told her. "Hi, you!" he shouted. There was an S.S. patrol coming down the street. The S.S. men were in evidence now at almost every street corner. "Hi, you! Give us a lift with these bags!" He was pleased to find that his voice still had authority, tired to death though he was. They all knew him. They all had had nice fat tips out of him from time to time.

"Certainly, Herr Ashkenazi!" one of the men said.

He looked swiftly at his wife. You see, they know who I am. He walked ahead, dragging his wife by the hand behind him. His knees felt like paper. She was whimpering, like a puppy outside a door.

"Don't worry, Malkeh dear," he reproved her tenderly. "It's all right. We'll soon be there."

She stopped whimpering. They continued for some minutes more, till they reached the end of the block. They were at Smocza Street. The Gestapo men came up from behind them and laid the cases down.

"Sorry, Herr Ashkenazi," they said. "That's all we can do. This is the end of our beat. We're on the alert."

"What for?" His heart turned over.

They shrugged their shoulders. One put his finger cannily to the side of his nose. The other put out his hand, and winked. Ashkenazi drew out his wallet and handed over a note.

"There's two of us," they pointed out. He handed over another note. They spat on the notes, folded them, and put them away.

"You can't leave us like this," Ashkenazi wailed. "I'm tired. I can't even lift it. You see my wife, how she is!"

"That's easy!" they said. They raised their whistles and blew a sharp blast. The noise shrilled loud and fearsome down the empty street. At once the patrol of the adjoining beat came running up, their rubber truncheons at the ready.

"What's up?" they asked threateningly.

"Nothing in particular. These folk just want someone to carry their bags." They lifted the bags again and handed them over, grinning. The others grinned back.



"Which way?" they asked.

"Straight on," Ashkenazi gestured.

"Payment in advance," they said.

He took out his wallet. His eyelids were hot as flame.

"Take!" he said, and handed over a note. His bowels were churning with terror. He knew that there was nothing in the world to prevent S.S. men knocking him down and just helping themselves to the whole wallet. For some reason they refrained. Was it because the signal for direct action had not yet been given?

"More!" they demanded. He took out another note. It was a huge sum of money. His head was swimming. He no longer knew the difference between two hundred and fifty zloty and ten thousand.

They moved on. They had reached the line of the inner Ghetto, where all that was left of the Jews had been herded, after the great deportations of a year and a half ago. The streets were still curiously deserted, except for the busy rash of S.S. men and policemen that kept on breaking out here and there. But there was a sense of eyes watching, of creatures looking on out of holes in bombed basements.

Then, before the corner of the block was reached, the S.S. men put the bags down, went "Phew!" and mopped their brows. They stood there for some moments, pretending they could hardly breathe, they were so exhausted.

"What's the matter?" asked Ashkenazi in alarm. He had paid well enough for their services.

"Too heavy!" one of the men said. "Don't you think so?" He nudged his mate.

"Much too heavy!" said the other. "Can't carry it a single step further the way it is!"

"How say we make 'em a bit lighter?" asked the first. "What do you think?"

"Fine idea! Let's get on with it!"

"No! No!" wailed Herr Ashkenazi.

"No! No!" wailed his wife.

The men pushed them away and got at the cases. They were locked, but so crammed it wasn't hard to force them open. There were a few pleasant things nice and handy; some brushes and combs, a clock, a couple of pairs of shoes.

"That'll do!" they said magnanimously, and shut the cases.

"How dare you!" moaned Leon Ashkenazi. "Do you know who I am? I'll tell them at Gestapo H.Q. Put those things back at once!"

"Shut your snout, pig-Jew!"

They walked on to the end of the block.



Somehow the joke had reached out into the neighbourhood. This time the S.S. men did not need to whistle; the next lot came running up, grinning all over their faces.

"*Trinkgeld!*" they demanded, and held out their hands. It was all a routine now. The money was only handed over, like the bribe a caravan pays the local Bedouin for the next stage between oasis and oasis, on the way to Mecca. Before the end of the block was reached, once more the bags were set down. Once more the porters wiped their foreheads. Once more they proceeded to lighten their burdens. This time it was the electric iron they impounded among the other levies.

"No!" cried Frau Ashkenazi loud and shrill. "It's mine!" She clawed at it. "Give it back to me!"

The man slapped her across the face with the back of his fist.

"Shut your snout, whore!" he said. The feel of the blood gushing out of her mouth sobered her up.

"Yes," she whispered meekly, and walked on. She coughed a little. One of the knocked-out teeth was sticking in her throat like a bread-crumble, but she managed to get it up and spit it out. Her husband slipped his hand into hers.

"Don't worry, love," he said to her. His beard was tousled, his hat had been knocked off, his shirt was as wet as if it had just left the wash-tub. "We're nearly there. Only a few minutes. That's Nalewki down the road, where we have that nice big house."

"Hi, you!" It was one of the men calling after them. "This is all we can do for you!" The men stopped, and put the bags down. They did not seem to like the dark cliffs of Nalewki looming up ahead. They stood, their arms folded.

"Thank you," Ashkenazi said to them humbly. "It's all right now," he assured his wife. "Look, they're not heavy!" He handed one of the bags over to her. With his right hand he held her left hand. Each held a bag in the other.

"The Jews," she said. "They're looking at us!" She was acutely conscious of eyes staring from every window, above, below, all round.

"One, two! One, two!" There was a posse of men turning the corner of Zamenhofa, coming up behind them. "One, two! One, two!" There was another order, loud, sharp, unintelligible. There was a click of rifle-bolts.

Suddenly Ashkenazi was running. They were both running, their eyes distressed like a hunted animal's. The broken clips of the bags came apart, so that they gaped wide open and whatever was left inside them gushed out on the pavement. The S.S. porters hesitated one moment, then raised their heels and ran after them; not with any hard intention of catching



them up, but because it was impossible to see Jews running in terror, and not run after them, as a dog finds it impossible not to run after a running cat.

"Help, Jews!" cried Ashkenazi. "Help! Help!"

A roar of laughter checked the pursuing S.S. men in their traces. It spread through the squad of S.S. men marching behind them, till it was almost as much as they could do to keep step.

"One, two! One, two!" the Sergeant brought out, wiping away his tears.

"Help, Jews!" cried Ashkenazi faintly.

Then suddenly what little breath was left in his body was knocked out by the impact against him of a large man advancing at full speed from the opposite direction. The two men stopped where they stood, each dithering to get beyond the other. Then, in the same instant, they recognized each other, those two lords of the Ghetto.

"Help, Yacki Kahn, help!" blubbered Ashkenazi, and seized the other's wrists.

"Let go!" shouted Kahn, and tore his arms away. He turned like lightning in the direction from which he had appeared.

"Help!" moaned Ashkenazi. "Where are you, Malkeh?" As he turned, a kick in the belly lifted him six inches into the air. He came down like a sack of flour. His wife lay on the ground already, a small twitching mass. From all the windows of Nalewki the watchful eyes looked down.

## II

Herr Kahn was in no frame of mind to help his old colleague, Leon Ashkenazi. He was not looking for Herr Ashkenazi, he was looking for the Wonder-Rabbi of Semienka, and it didn't seem likely he was going to find him.

He had had a most unsatisfactory day; at all events after the appearance of Erna, the secretary of Straupitz-Kalmin, at the Café Bella Vista. Things were going quite nicely until then. He had done one or two quite good deals, and had had a fine breakfast, with a couple of gammon rashers. So his wife didn't keep a *kosher* household! Well, what? So he wouldn't go to Heaven? Well, he wouldn't go to Heaven. He wouldn't have minded the thought of the other place, if there were any chance that his wife, Rivkah, wouldn't be with him down there. But there wasn't the ghost of a chance. She'd be there!

No wonder he had to have a little bit of comfort on the side now and again with plump little pieces, like Erna, and Frau Gebhardt, and this Pudl,



and the others. His wife shouldn't be so lean. She had elbows like pokers and collar-bones like a fire-grate.

God damn Erna! What did she have to come along and upset him for? He was having a nice quiet game of dominoes. He deserved a bit of a rest; he worked hard enough, didn't he? And then like a damn fool he goes and gives her that nice little lapis lazuli box!

He was very cross. His bad temper cast a gloom over the whole of the Bella Vista, which wasn't a very hilarious place at the best of times. Yet he knew his temper was idiotic. The news Erna had brought him was really something. She deserved the lapis lazuli box and more for it. But another thing was true, too! The longer he stayed put on his bottom the less worth the lapis lazuli box the news became. That's when news is worth something, when you get to work with it at once, before it gets round to the other fellow.

Well, what was he going to do about it? So Himmler was coming to Warsaw tomorrow. What had that to do with Yacki Kahn? It was depressing, that's all. Nobody liked that fellow. There was something cold and creepy about him. He was a crook, of course, one of the big-shot crooks of all time. But there are ways and ways of being a crook, with guts, with humour, with red blood in your veins . . . like . . . like Yacki Kahn, for instance.

What was Himmler coming to Warsaw for? Probably for a lot of reasons. There were too many rackets going on in which Heinrich Himmler wasn't taking any part. He, Yacki, would get the low-down on all that from various sources before the day was out. And, of course, the deportations would begin again. It was the general opinion that when they began again they'd make a clean sweep of the Ghetto. Well, that was all right, too. It couldn't possibly concern Yacki Kahn. When the present job-lot of Jews had gone, the trains would come rolling in from the other direction and bring in another lot to take their place. That was when they would need him; they couldn't possibly get things going again without Yacki Kahn.

Wasn't there any chance of their importing another Yacki Kahn from somewhere else? Ridiculous; there was only one Yacki in all Europe. Would Himmler think so? Why should Himmler want to get rid of him? Had he ever done Himmler any harm?

Well, at all events, old Müller, Brandy-guts, would always be on his side. They were a couple of buddies, they were, like that. . . . He mentally made the gesture of placing two fingers side by side. He'd put a pretty penny in old Müller's pocket, one way and another, since they'd hooked up, the two of them, not to mention most of Müller's stock of cognac. Not to mention his stock of dames.

Old Müller couldn't possibly cut up rough. He had him there. Not



mentally this time, but actually, he pressed down his thumb on a spot in the table before him. He had them all there. He did not merely pay out dough to them, they were in his power. He knew that Kriminalkommissar Albers had stolen eight hundred and seventy United States dollars from that confiscated wallet before he delivered it up to Kriminaloberkommissar Mannheim. He knew that Scharführer Klampert told Oberscharführer Bamberg that the arranged rake-off from the women's handbag consignment was twenty-five per cent, while in fact it was thirty, and he pocketed the five. And as for Brandy-guts himself . . . Ho, ho! . . . Brandy-guts, who touched a steady two per cent from the whole turnover of the Ghetto factories' deliveries, while he told his superior Hinze, with whom he split it, that he got only one per cent. (That Yacki was one too clever for Müller, and what Müller really got was only one half per cent, had nothing at all to do with the case.) He had them all on toast, from high to low. He knew perfectly well, for instance, that the S.S. man, Wernicke, the telephonist at Gestapo House, touched money from Ashkenazi, and was a party to the gold teeth racket; the gold teeth of the liquidated Jews who vanished into thin air, instead of being handed over to the Nazi authorities. He had them all on toast.

He got up from his chair. He had thrown off that idiotic depression he had got into earlier. Funny the effect the name of that man had on people. Like those new drugs that were coming into the market, sulphur-something-or-other. He'd show 'em. He'd go straight to Gestapo House and have it out with old Brandy-guts. Nothing like a frank heart-to-heart talk between pals.

He did not go straight to Gestapo House. He was a sensible man, and he was aware that nothing helps out a frank heart-to-heart talk between even the closest of pals like a nice piece of jewellery, a first-class gold cigarette-case or a diamond ring. Yes, he had the very thing in his secret hiding-place at the back of the plumbing in his flat, that huge pearl tie-pin. After all, the War must end some day. Brandy-guts would look like Rockefeller in that tie-pin. Yacki didn't particularly want to rub up against Rivkah, his wife; but that's where the tie-pin was, so off he went.

Rivkah wasn't in. She was gallivanting about somewhere. It was odd that Herr Kahn should be so jealous of his wife, for she was a very unattractive woman. But that's the way husbands often are about unattractive wives. Their jealousy is a sort of compensation for all the qualities they would like their wives to have.

She wasn't in. What was worse, the pearl tie-pin wasn't in, either. She had got wise to that hiding-place, the bitch. There was nothing that pointed nose of hers wouldn't ferret out. The rest of the stuff in the cigar-box was there, the gold dollar-pieces, the brooches, the cigarette-case, but



that damn tie-pin wasn't. She had hoped he wouldn't notice it, eh? He'd give her not notice it.

And why just a man's tie-pin she should have stolen? Why not a woman's brooch, a woman's bracelet? She had given it to her fancy man! Who could her fancy man be, who the hell? It couldn't be a Jew, no Jew in the Ghetto would dare to make a scandal with Yacki Kahn's wife. Besides, no Jew would want a bag of bones like that. It must be some damn Gestapo man! God Almighty! Kahn raised his fist to Heaven. He'd denounce them both to Gestapo Headquarters, that's what he'd do; a Jewish woman she called herself, betraying her Jewish husband with a goy Gestapo man!

Where did the goy take her to, to have his fun? Perhaps they came here, to his own apartment, to his own bedroom! Perhaps it was one of the guards Müller had assigned to him, to look after his place! Maybe it was more than one of the guards, maybe two guards, three guards. Maybe they were all laughing at him behind his back!

He had worked himself up into a fine state by the time his wife got back. She was alone when she turned up. Doubtless she and her man, or men, had been tipped off by their spy.

"Nu?" he said through his teeth. "So you've been to stay with a friend of yours, the wife of an old friend from the family?"

"Yes," Rivkah said shortly. "Fat lot you care. She's dead!"

"She's dead, is she? So she's dead! And perhaps you'll tell me what she died of?"

She turned and stared at him.

"You know perfectly well," she said. "What's the matter with you?"

"Maybe she died from eating too many pearl tie-pins?"

She bit her lip. He had been drinking again, possibly with that pig Müller; a cholera should take him!

"Maybe yes," she said. She didn't feel like having a set-to with him now.

"Maybe yes, eh? Maybe yes. Well, let me tell you one thing, Rivkah. I'm talking to you quietly now. I don't want any rows. You'll go back and get me back that pearl tie-pin at once. Do you hear me? You will go back at once." He was exciting himself into a show of terror and splendour, like a turkey in a farmyard. The wattles were quivering a little. The neck was getting redder from moment to moment.

Her next words were unusually quiet. He should have taken warning from that. But perhaps it was too late to take warning.

"You'll tell me, perhaps, what you're talking about, pearl tie-pins?"

"You know what I'm talking about! It is gone. Where is it? Why not a woman's brooch, eh? Why just *gerade* a man's tie-pin? You'll get it back from him at once!"



Then all hell was unloosed. It was really extraordinary how that big and powerful man could stand for it. She was a small woman. He could have cracked her like a nut between his hands, which were not large but as powerful as a steel vice. He had used them that way more than once already. But never on his wife, Rivkah. She had his measure.

She let fly. She was really quite depressed about the death of the wife of the old friend of the family. So she took it out on Yacki. She lambasted him for quite a long while. In a way, it was a relief that Herr Himmler was coming to Warsaw next day. She couldn't keep on that way with Herr Himmler in Warsaw. And just when the torrent showed signs of thinning in the torrent-bed, it brought down a mortifying discovery from up-country. Rivkah suddenly remembered with shattering distinctness that her husband had made a deal over that pearl tie-pin with a Polish pal of his, a racketeer named Powonski.

There was no doubt of it at all. It was Powonski who had that tie-pin. Yacki Kahn felt a perfect idiot. He felt more than that, he felt a bully. He had been suspecting his Jewish wife of a clandestine love-affair with a goy, a Gestapo man. He felt like blubbering, and if he had not been a strong man, with immense self-control, he would have done so. Then she heaped coals of fire on his head.

"Sit down!" she ordered. "Lay the table! I have a meat-stew for you. It just wants heating up."

Perhaps it was that magnanimity that had kept Herr Kahn welded to Frau Kahn all these years.

The meat-stew was warmed up. They ate it. Altogether a good deal of time was used up by Yacki Kahn against his domestic background, on that fateful day. A good deal had happened around and about the place by the time Herr Kahn was on his way to see Herr Müller at Gestapo House. A pity it wasn't that pearl tie-pin he had with him; but it was a nice gold cigarette-case. It had belonged to one of the Rothschild cousins, from Paris.

By the time Kahn had arrived at Gestapo House he had recovered a good deal of his cocky self-assurance. His cap-peak was drawn over to one side, not at all in the attempt to disguise the white weal on his forehead; but to draw attention to it. He wore no waistcoat. His good shirt of English linen was rucked up over the waist-line of his slightly peg-top trousers. The large body balanced beautifully on the small, almost dancing feet.

He walked past the sentries as if they were flies who either had been, or were about to be, swatted on to the wall. He walked so swiftly they had no time to challenge him, even if it had been in their minds to. There were no Jews about the passages of the place, but there was a good deal of scurrying to and fro of clerks with files.



He went through the chief's outer office without knocking; then permitted himself to rap with his knuckles on the glass panels of Müller's door. He waited for no "Come in!" He entered, his shoulders swaying like daffodils in the breeze.

Müller sat at his desk. The lieutenant and two N.C.O.s of the Jewish police force stood beside him, looking down on a large map of the Ghetto.

"Howdo, fellers!" said Kahn easily, waving a hand at them. "Howdo, Müller!"

Müller switched round, and raised his bloodshot eyes.

"Who the flaming hell——" he roared. Then the words stopped on his lips. There were no words even in his throat. Then they began to come up again from below. They rolled and jostled against each other like pebbles in a boiling kettle. Then the words came out. The greater portion of them were foul, of course.

"Who let you in, you lump of filth?" he wanted to know. "Who the flaming hell do you think you are?" The sentences piled themselves on top of each other, but they had practically no more content than that.

Yacki Kahn stood there, like one in a dream. The fleshy mouth gaped open like the sole of a tramp's boot. He had not shaved well, and a tiny blob of sweat seemed to stand poised, like a billiard ball on a conjuror's billiard cue, on the tip of every separate blonde hair round the borders of his almost Aryan face. He was, in fact, very surprised. What seemed to be happening was not actually happening.

He had not taken his cap off. Normally, in the circles a Müller and a Kahn frequented, those civilities were not indulged in.

"Take that mucking cap off!" howled Herr Müller, as if there at last Kahn had committed a crime which was absolutely beyond tolerance. The yell was loud enough to puncture the ceiling.

But Kahn still stood there, gaping and goggling. He would wake up soon.

"Knock it off! Knock it off!" Müller was addressing the Jewish policemen now. "Knock it off or I'll shoot it off!" His hand was at his holster.

The Lieutenant hesitated a moment, for, even yet, it was impossible to forget entirely that this man was Yacki Kahn, or had once been Yacki Kahn, very recently. Then he came round. He smacked Kahn's cap off his head on to the floor. Then he skipped back, a little like an amateur who has been persuaded to enter a lion's cage and touch his paw; he knows the lion has no claws and no teeth, but it is a little nerve-racking, just the same.

The impact of less formidable flesh and bone brought Kahn back to his senses.



"You can't talk . . . like this . . . to me, Müller!" he brought out. "You just can't do it! After all I've done for you——"

With one of those fantastic changes of mood and aspect which made Müller the dangerous creature he was, the chief suddenly deflated himself like a bull-frog.

"Yes?" he asked, almost pleasantly. "After all you've done for me—well, what?"

There you are, Kahn said obscurely to himself. All you've got to do is to put on a face with these people. Then, before you know where you are, they're eating out of your hand.

"It's worked both ways, it's true," said Kahn magnanimously. He felt very empty, despite his wife's meat-stew, at the pit of his stomach. "And I'd rather we didn't say any more, either of us, in front of these bastards." He meant the Jewish policemen.

"I shouldn't mind about them," said Müller civilly.

"There are just one or two things I'd like to talk over," ventured Kahn. "But I insist. I want these swine out of the way."

"You insist, do you? You insist, eh? Get me some cognac, somebody!" The tone was raw again. But he was addressing one of the underlings crouching in the rear parts of the office. The cognac was poured out. He drained off a glass. The pink filaments of the pilot-light began to flicker and glow in his face.

Kahn began to feel uneasy suddenly. Panic began to knock inside him, as if water had leaked into the petrol that drove him.

"I'm not going to stand for any nonsense," he blurted. "If you dare to lay a finger on me, there's not one of my men who doesn't know enough about you to blow you sky-high!"

"Your men?" said Müller, very quietly and evenly. The light was running madly to and fro along the network of coloured blood-vessels. "They're all here, waiting for you. We were expecting you, you see. And if you hadn't come, we'd have asked you along."

Kahn felt as if his heart was cased in ice.

"Look what I've brought you," he said. "We've always been good pals, you and me." He fumbled into his trouser-pocket as clumsily as if his fingers were crippled with arthritis, and brought out the gold cigarette-case. He moved it over jerkily towards Müller's desk. There was a length of lead piping beside the map. Müller raised it and brought it down with a resounding crack on Kahn's hand. The cigarette-case fell tinkling to the ground.

"Oi! Oi!" moaned Kahn. He brought his fingers to his mouth, to give them some sort of comfort. One or two were broken, probably.

The chief looked down to the map again.

"Take him off, somebody!" he said, as if he were talking about a soiled



bed-sheet. The two Jewish policemen led him off. He gave no trouble at all, even when they took his revolver from him, his wallet and his stray pieces of jewellery. He was flung into a dark tiny cell two floors below street level. The gaoler turned the lock on him. He was safe in there. He could be attended to later.

The situation was so appalling that Kahn refused to contemplate it. It was terribly difficult for him to go on assuring himself that it wasn't really happening, he was just dreaming. The agonizing pain in his fingers precluded that. But he could at least try to convince himself that it was a terrible, terrible mistake. Müller was so drunk he had mistaken him for somebody else, his one-time rival, Schwarz, perhaps, who had been bumped off some time ago. Or somebody had told atrocious lies about him; for instance, that he had been smuggling in rifles from the Polish Underground and selling them to the Jewish Fighting Organization. Well, it was true he *had* sold a few rifles to the Jews, but not so that anyone could notice it; not as many as Müller himself, if the truth were known.

It stank inside there. It was awful. The only place to sit down was a damp ledge about eight inches deep. There were rats.

It was a mistake. Before long Müller would come along personally, and explain everything. He refused to think of the situation he was in. He switched his mind round violently to his wife. To think harshly of the Gestapo didn't get him anywhere. It was more sensible to think harshly of his wife, who had been betraying him with a Gestapo man. In fact, his mind jumped back several stages, some distance back of the point where his wife had cleared up the mystery of the pearl tie-pin. She hadn't cleared up the mystery of the tie-pin. She was still at the point where he envisioned her clipped in the arms of the Gestapo lout. He'd show her up, the whore, a Jewish woman polluting herself like this.

"You whore!" he yelled at the top of his voice. But he found that it was the faintest trickle of sound that issued from his lips. He was frightened how tiny the sound of his voice was. Was all this her fault, he asked himself suddenly. Was it *she*, who had denounced *him*, to the Gestapo? He banged both fists on the slimy walls of the cell, and the hurt hand recoiled with such a stab of pain he almost vomited.

Then he became maudlin about her.

"Rivkah," he moaned. "How could you treat me like this? Haven't I always been a good husband to you? Did I ever bring *shiksahs* back to the house, like so many low-lives do? Why should you do such a thing to me? Didn't I give you jewellery, and silk shawls, and fine shoes, whatever your heart wanted?

He began to cry, and went on crying for some minutes. Then he stopped.



"The bitch!" he yelled. "The whore!" He shook his fist at her in the foetid darkness.

It was at that stage of the emotional experience that he heard the sound of feet approaching and of a key turned in the lock.

He rose from the ledge.

"Yes?" he asked. His heart was beating wildly.

"Get out!" the gaoler barked. "The Herr Chef wants to talk to you!"

His heart rang a peal of bells.

"What did I tell you?" he exulted, seizing the gaoler by the wrists. "It's all a mistake! Didn't I tell you from the beginning?"

"Let go!" the gaoler snarled. He pulled his arms away, and shoved him a yard or two along the passage. "Keep your filthy hands off me!"

"All right!" said Yacki. "Filthy hands, eh? You'll see filthy hands! Go on forward, you lump!"

The man went on, Yacki went behind him. The journey to Müller's office seemed to take a lot less time than the journey the other way. The door was thrown open, and Yacki was standing once more in the presence of his bosom pal. Müller raised his head.

"Oh, it's you, Kahn!" he said amiably. "I'm sorry about all this trouble. I hope you're feeling all right?"

Kahn was grinning all over his face. He didn't know whether to laugh or to cry.

"Thank you, thank you!" he said. "It's nice to sit down on a nice chair. I knew it was all a mistake. God bless you, Müller!" He would have kissed his friend, had his friend been any nearer. Instead he smiled at him like a bride.

"Well, it's not a mistake, exactly," observed Müller. "The fact is, I need your help."

"Of course, of course," Yacki beamed. "You know, if you're in any sort of trouble, all you've got to do is to say a word to Yacki Kahn. Perhaps, if you should just let me go to a doctor first, he should tie up my hand for me, it hurts a little——"

"Blast your hand!" snapped Müller. The lips remained parted, so that the teeth showed. He was really a very incalculable person, this Müller, some people couldn't get on with him at all.

"Let be my hand!" conceded Kahn. "It can wait. Well, what can I do for you, Müller? You know I would do anything, like for my own brother."

"Well, it's like this," said Müller. He was his nicer self again. The lips were where they should be. "You know about that old fraud they call the Wonder-Rabbi?"

"Yes?" There was a tiny scratching on Kahn's heart like a mouse on a wainscoting.



"The *Frechheit!*" bellowed Müller. "The impertinence!" Kahn waited. "The stinking sack of fleas!" He added several further epithets all less elegant. Kahn lifted his eyes respectfully.

"Yes?" they inquired.

Müller at length got down from the general to the particular.

"There was a meeting of the *Judenrat* today, at twelve-thirty——"

"And?"

"—to arrange about the deportations."

This was the first Yacki Kahn had heard in so many words about the deportations.

"And?"

"The bag of filth came into the Council Room while things were being worked out. He shoved his stinking snout in. He upset things."

"Well, please?"

"Then he went off, he and that pimp that is always with him. We sent out a squad to locate them and bring them in. He can't be found anywhere. He's disappeared."

"So you would like, please?"

"I would like to fry him and put him on a plate for our visitor tomorrow."

"Yes, Herr Müller?"

"Go and find him, Kahn," yelled Müller, "and bring him in!"

"Of course, Herr Müller." It was odd how respectful Yacki had become all of a sudden, master and man, not bosom pals any more. Then a thought occurred to him.

"Excuse me. Perhaps if you could let me have back my revolver," he suggested diffidently, "and my wallet——"

"If you don't find him," said Müller, "you know what's coming to you!" He completely ignored the reference to the revolver and the wallet, as if the words had not been uttered.

"Yes, Herr Müller."

"All right. Muck off!"

### III

Yacki Kahn was not too pleased about the assignment. He had always felt that the protection he had extended over the Wonder-Rabbi was his bit of an insurance-policy with Heaven. It mightn't get him a front seat, but it might be good enough for a standing-place in the gallery, during part of the performance, anyhow. He didn't like the job of digging up the old gentleman from the hole where he had buried himself. But needs must when the



devil drives, so that's all there was to it. For, honestly, he didn't like the thought of that cell where they'd kept him for he didn't know how long; perhaps only half an hour, but it felt like years. He didn't like the thought of all the business they hadn't had time to get round to, the burning with cigar-stubs, the plucking out of finger-nails. So there was only one thing for it—the Wonder-Rabbi.

It wasn't going to be at all easy. In the first place, he didn't know if any of his trustees were still around. Certainly the best of them would be down in the cellars, as Müller had said. God damn his black soul, the villain, the Haman, the anti-Semite!

And in the second place the Wonder-Rabbi was, after all, a Wonder-Rabbi. How safe is it to go monkeying around with Wonder-Rabbis? Personally, he wasn't superstitious, but not even professors know everything, what about radio waves and so on? He turned the corner and went northward up Karmelicka. His hand ached like hell. His heart was full of foreboding.

Where was he going to go to? Who would answer his questions when he started asking about the Wonder-Rabbi? At all events, he was still a rich man. Money talks. It asks questions and answers them. He put his hand to his breast-pocket. His wallet was not there, of course. "The dirty robber!" he muttered. "He should rob his old friends like this! His intestines should rot inside him!" The curses went on hissing and spitting, like the steam from a kettle. He would have to go home first, and get some more money, and a few little knick-knacks.

He went home. His wife wasn't there. Where was she? he wondered. The place of a good wife is at home. She should have been there to bandage up his hand. The phantom Gestapo lover flickered a moment, then disappeared. He had other worries. He went to his secret places, and stocked up again with money and gold bits and pieces. He was like a dog with his bones, the way he used to dig hiding-places all over. He hadn't got another revolver; he wasn't a believer in revolvers; they're too noisy. He preferred his men to do any shooting that might be necessary. He was better with his bare hands.

Well, he was stocked up now. He'd better start on the job. He wondered if all the men of his gang had been robbed by Müller or if the quieter ones were still on their regular jobs. Some of them lay doggo, they spent much of their time in cellars or rooms in bombed houses. It's odd how much secret floor-space protected from the weather you can knock up with a hammer and a few planks and nails, in a bombed and gutted building.

He went around. He drew blank everywhere. Perhaps there would be some of the Yunaks or the Jewish policemen hanging around the Café Bella Vista. But no. The shutters were up. Frau Polaček obviously didn't like



the way things were going. She must have taken off her large tinkling ear-rings and her compact bust to less ominous regions in Warsaw City. He went to the headquarters of the Jewish Police Force. Sergeant Finkelstein was in charge; he and Finkelstein were old friends. They often swapped yarns together. But the Sergeant treated Herr Kahn with the utmost reserve. He was writing in a note-book, and he hardly raised his head from his labours.

"Sorry," he said, "we're understaffed." That was all he said.

"What's the matter with you, Finkelstein?" Kahn exploded. "Have I got the black plague, maybe?"

Sergeant Finkelstein looked up from his note-book and stared Yacki Kahn straight between the eyes. It was to be gathered that the black plague was exactly what Yacki Kahn had. Herr Müller didn't love him any more.

Herr Kahn went off, jingling the gold bits in his trouser-pockets. Money talks. He had the last word, after all. He moved off towards the smaller Ghetto, and, taking a short cut, found himself at the corner of the old mews where the "Aurora" was. The "Aurora" was a small select brothel, for the special delectation of S.S. noncoms. It was a private concession to himself, no connection with the public institution run by the Nazis themselves, after the Jewish Council had turned down flat the suggestion the Nazi authorities had made that the Jewish Council should run it for them. It was a high-minded proceeding, for undoubtedly the Council could have eked out very usefully the revenues from interment with the revenues from prostitution.

"I wonder if any of the girls would know anything?" he asked himself. But no, he told himself dourly. To begin with, they're probably all asleep at this time of day; they're only just getting up. And then, the clients are S.S. men, not Jews. Jews aren't allowed here, and they wouldn't be much use if they were. They haven't got money or guts for this kind of entertainment. And is it likely they'd tell a bunch of whores where the Wonder-Rabbi's gone and hidden himself? And the S.S. men don't know. That's why I'm here. He walked on. He'd have to find out from the Jews somehow.

He let his hands play among the gold dollars and the other trinkets. But somehow he did not impress himself. Money talks, he repeated firmly. Money talks? If you're going in a cattle-truck tomorrow, with lime burning through the clothes on your back and the soles of your boots, so money talks? What shall I do? Where shall I go to? How many know where the Wonder-Rabbi is? And of those that know, they will tell me, yes?

*"If you don't find him, you know what's coming to you."*

He heard Müller's voice, quite plainly, as if he were talking in his ear. He shook his head, and laughed uneasily.



"I'm getting mad as well, maybe," he muttered. "I've got to find him, do you hear? What are you frightened about? Is the Rabbi God? He isn't even an angel. He's just a man; they tell foolish grandmother stories about him, so he's frightened."

He was on the edge of the inner Ghetto now.

"I'll go to the leather factories of Franciskanska," he told himself. "I have connections. Maybe I will learn something."

He went along to Franciskanska, the part that had been included in the smaller Ghetto, when they had curtailed it in nineteen hundred and forty-one by pushing the wall back from Freta to Bonifraterska. There was still a certain amount of work going on in the factories; but not much. Obviously there had either been a go-slow order issued by the foreman, or the workers had just naturally fallen into a go-slow tempo. If there's a fair chance of taking a death-ride tomorrow, you can't help going slow on the bench today. And it was quite evident that a number of workers hadn't turned up. You could almost see them melting out of the workshops, like snow in a thaw. Perhaps some of them wanted to spend their last day with the people they loved, if they had any. If today wasn't their last day, tomorrow would very likely be, or the day after. The last day in Warsaw, that is to say. The last day anywhere wouldn't be long in coming.

There was a foreman Kahn knew in one of the factories.

"Hallo, Brejnin," said Kahn.

The other fellow looked at him coldly and unpleasantly. It was exactly the same expression as Sergeant Finkelstein had had.

"Maybe you don't recognize who I am?" asked Kahn. Perhaps that explained it.

"What do you want?" said Brejnin.

"Hush!" said Kahn. He lowered his voice. "I think I can put a good thing in your way."

"Go to Hell!" said Brejnin, and turned his back.

Kahn withdrew. He was aware of a temptation to land his boot in the other man's behind, and send him flying among the benches. That was certainly the way he would have behaved yesterday; but not today, somehow. He felt somehow he was not as tall as he had been till very recently, and his shoulders not so broad. His left hand was not fit for anything.

He went to two or three more workshops and store-houses around the place. He got no encouragement. He realized all this was getting him nowhere, and time was getting on. He had better ask at the blocks of apartments. It was true that the old Rabbi would not have been marched up through somebody's front entrance; he would have been smuggled into some cellar somewhere, through a hole in a party wall. But the news of his whereabouts might have crept up from the cellars to the higher regions of the



house. He knew most of the house-porters. They were Jews, of course. But they were directly appointed by the Nazis themselves, like the Jewish policemen. They were grizzled, hard-bitten old men, as a rule. They had nasty jobs. They had to keep their eyes and ears open; if any mischief was brewed within the walls that were in their charge, and they didn't report it, they had a bad time. They had the nastiest job of all. When their particular block was chosen for deportation, it was they who had to go round to all the people living there, families and individuals, and let them know at what day and hour they were expected to turn up at the railway-sidings.

Nobody loved the house-porters. They had nothing much to lose. He might conceivably get some dope from the house-porters.

He tried one or two. It was the same with them as with the policeman and the factory men. They stared at him as if he were dirt; as if he were the black plague itself. And only a few hours ago, they had been frightened to death of him! It was strange. Something more frightening than Yacki Kahn had come up over the horizon of the Warsaw Ghetto.

He was getting tired and footsore. The day was dragging on. S.S. patrols were coming up into the streets. They came marching, then they stopped in their appointed places, and lounged against street corners, awaiting the agreed signal. He knew what that meant. It meant the softening-up process was going to begin soon, the process that always went on the evenings before the mornings of deportation. The idea was you put the fear of hell up the Jews. You made them feel that bad as the Journey was, it might possibly turn out to be better than making any trouble in the Ghetto. You beat up a few families here and there, did a bit of raping here and there, caved in the skulls of a few folk, dropped a baby or two from a third-floor window. It worked wonders.

He was getting tired. He must get some satisfaction from somebody somewhere. Müller might be leaving his office, though, usually, on nights like this, he preferred to be on the spot, to see how things went.

He was in Mila Street now. He remembered that old Katz had number seventeen. He was a tough one, that Katz. Katz had touched quite a few little presents from his old governor, Yacki Kahn, one time and another. Perhaps Katz would know something.

Yacki knocked on Katz's basement door. Katz opened it.

"Yes?" he asked, peering into the half-light. He was a bit blind at the best of times.

"Hello, my old pal Katz!" said Kahn breezily. "It's me. It's Yacki Kahn!"

The man seemed to shiver a little at the sound of the name, Kahn observed. That's fine, he told himself. There's life in the old dog yet.



"Yes?" Katz asked again. There was no perceptible note of dread in the voice.

"I want to ask you something. I have one or two little toys for you." Katz was notoriously a greedy bastard. "Can I come in?"

"What do you want to ask?"

It was now or never. Besides, what had he to fear down in the basement of number seventeen Mila Street?

"I just want to find out where the Wonder-Rabbi of Semienka is, God bless him! I want to ask him a question or two."

Katz was silent for some seconds; then he half-turned towards the room behind him. It seemed there was a gathering of people there.

"Listen, Jews!" he cried. The voice was loud and shrill. "Yacki Kahn the thief is here! He's asking where the Wonder-Rabbi is! He wants to hand him over to the Gestapo!"

But Yacki Kahn had already turned on his heels and was hastening as fast as they would carry him, up the half-stairway, across the vestibule, and out into Mila Street. His heart was knocking like a sledge-hammer. He managed not to run, but only with the greatest difficulty. He turned the corner into Zamenhofa Street, then sped fearfully along the block, the words still ringing in his ears; then he turned the corner again into Kupiecka, forgetting that that was a cul-de-sac. Here the order to begin softening-up had already been given. A posse of S.S. men were clustered along a line of ground-floor windows, playfully smashing them in with the butts of their rifles.

Yacki Kahn turned, came back into Zamenhofa, walked south towards Gesia; then, hearing a woman's piercing scream, turned north towards Mila again. He turned right on Mila, and reached Nalewki. He heard a dull thud, as of a body falling somewhere, perhaps into a courtyard, and sped down Nalewki, as if mad dogs with slavering fangs were after him. Here, in Nalewki, there was a sudden boiling up of the excitement. On the other side of the street were three S.S. men. One had a woman by the hair, stretched out along the pavement behind him. A second held aloft a small child. A third held upright a rusty metal spike.

"*Los, Hans, los!*" cried the man with a spike. The man with the child lifted it high into the air with a joyous yell and impaled it upon the spike. At that moment, perhaps from the shadow of a doorway, a woman in her middle years sprang out and fell upon the group of three men. She was yelling, howling, spitting, like a captured wild cat in a sack. But this one was not captured. She had set herself free. "It's true! It's true!" she was shouting, and, chimaerically, the words were English. "It's true! It's true! It's true!"

Two seconds later, the three men, who took as little time as that to



recover from their astonishment, must assuredly have felled her to the ground and disembowelled her. But in that moment a young woman and a young man behind her jumped out of nowhere at all, as it seemed, like panthers out of the twined darkness of jungle trees; they had thrown themselves upon the three men and the one woman, they had snatched the woman off her feet, and carried her away down a narrow passage.

"You crazy lunatic!" the young woman shouted. The words rang out very clearly. The language was also foreign, Russian. Then they were invisible. The noise the three S.S. men made as they charged after them seemed less like human sounds than the bellowings of outraged bulls.

Yacki Kahn moved on down Nalewki, still not running, still desperately not running. He turned right-handed into Gesia Street, his eyes so distended with horror that not until he actually collided with him was he aware that a man was running towards him, a man with a black beard. They both stood dithering there, each seeking to go past the other. Then, in the same instant, they recognized each other, two lords of the Ghetto.

"Help, Yacki Kahn, help!" blubbered Ashkenazi—for it was he—and seized the other's wrists.

Behind Ashkenazi a woman lay on the pavement, a small twitching mass. From behind the prostrate woman, the S.S. men came trotting easily.

"Let go!" shouted Kahn, and tore his arms away. He turned like lightning in the direction from which he had appeared. For five yards, ten yards, he was still walking. Then he heard, or fancied he heard, the sound of feet running after him. At last he, too, broke down. He lifted his feet and ran, beyond the Nalewki crossing, along Gesia, towards Bonifraterska, where grim and stark the Ghetto wall ran, shutting off the world.

The breath of the pursuers was hot on his neck. They could have shot him very easily, but they preferred not to. They preferred to have a little run for their money.

Then suddenly there was an explosion in Yacki Kahn's skull. The huge round bursting dome was full of flame and flung fragments of rock, like the air above the crater of a volcano. He turned upon his pursuers and pommelled their faces with his fists.

"Fight, Jews!" he was yelling. The sound was hoarse and frantic, like a steamer hooting in a foggy river. "Fight, Jews! Fight, Jews!" Then he fell. The stab of pain was all over everywhere, and there was no time to decide if it was the pain of the broken hand or the caved-in skull. The S.S. men went on cracking the bones. They liked the sound of it.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE knocking went on and on at the door of the Wolff apartment.

"I wonder who it is?" Elsie Silver asked herself. "I hope everything's all right. I wonder if it's got anything to do with Oskar? I wonder."

"Frau Wolff!" she called out. "The door!" She used the English words. Silly ass! she said to herself. It was funny how she was thinking the whole time in English now. Normally she thought in German. After all, she had been in Germany long enough. She was an attested Aryan, a German by marriage, the widow of a famous soldier and politician. Well, all that wouldn't heat up this chilly bath. The knocking stopped. She finished her bath, such as it was, nearly tearing her skin to pieces with a piece of the gritty lump of gravel that passed for soap in Poland. Then she dressed herself and went back into the sitting-room again.

Frau Wolff was sitting exactly as she had left her, back in that huge arm-chair, with her mouth open, exactly like a colossal rag doll, those that are made for the children of millionaires, rather bigger than themselves. It was not an edifying sight; the lady emitted an odd sort of snore, too, without any consistency either in pitch or interval. It might be worse, thought Elsie; she might be talking.

Fortunately it was not cold, it was the third week of April. What was she going to do with herself? Read? The Wolffs didn't seem to go in for books, not even the best books, such as the best people read in Hamburg. Play noughts and crosses with herself? She didn't see a pencil lying around. Eat? Not a bad idea. But how would Frau Wolff take it if she went rooting around in her kitchen? And did she know how to make the best of the doubtless not many and not rich ingredients available in the Wolff kitchen? Better leave that till Frau Wolff awoke, if she could last out. The lady might even be making a meal for the husband, some time. What then? A little embroidery, sunflowers on a stretched flour-sack canvas frame. God forbid! I'm still sane. Or am I?

She pinched herself. She held up her fingers before her eyes, to see if they were steady and if she still counted five on a hand.

"I'm still sane," she assured herself. She sat down in that other big chair half-way across the room. Frau Wolff snored. She sat. This is just about the most cheerful party I've ever been to in my life. Oskar, Oskar! You've got something to pay for, honey!

Half an hour passed. An hour. It was intensely depressing. She must have dropped off, and when she became aware of things again, it was not sound, she realized, but smell that had awakened her. She was alone in the room. There was a sound of something happening down the passage. That was where the kitchen was. That was where the smell of soup was



coming from. She got up and stalked firmly along to the kitchen, hesitating a moment to look across to the window. It was all right. The curtain was drawn.

"Ha, Fraülein, it's you!" ejaculated Frau Wolff, waving a large wooden cooking-spoon towards her friendlily, as if it were a fan or a parasol. "I didn't disturb you, did I?" From her tone and demeanour you were forced to conclude that nothing remained in her mind of the distressing *tête-à-tête* they had had earlier.

"Not at all," said Elsie, more than ready to forget. "I've been napping. I had a bath. It did me good."

"I'm so sorry it was such a miserable bath. Cold water, no bath-salts, nothing."

"Not at all," said Elsie again. "It freshened me up." She wondered how long this twittering was going to go on. "Soup, I see"—breaking into a subject she found infinitely more attractive.

Yes, it was soup she saw, and smelled.

"Come and see," requested Frau Wolff. She was obviously an all-round craftswoman, who took pride in her handiwork. "I've laid place for all three of us. My husband, too, of course. He'll be coming in any time. I hope you don't mind eating in the kitchen."

"Not at all," said Elsie. She stooped over the pot. "What a nice-looking soup!" she observed, her mouth watering. It was that. There were little islands of rich fat swimming in it, with submerged reefs of vegetable, and dumplings, like bergs, floating about. "Is it ready?" she wanted to know.

"Quite ready," said Frau Wolff. "Taste!" She dipped the wooden spoon and handed it over. It was hot, but excellent, full of flavour.

"It's full of flavour!" said Elsie.

"Shall we just wait for Hugo?"

Elsie's heart sank.

"But of course."

They waited a little time, indulging in small talk. The talk was very small indeed, for if you put your foot in almost any direction beyond food or clothes—and then, food and clothes in the most abstract terms—you were in danger of springing some sort of booby-trap.

"Personally, I think parsnips fried in deep fat are first rate. They're so sweet."

"Of all the *Würste*, I think my favourite used to be Thüringer Bratwurst."

"Oh, you knew Thüringer? We used to stay often in Salzkammergut." But that way lay danger. "Yes, that's the way to make *Knödel* if you like, Tiroler *Speckknödel*."



I'm ravenous, Elsie's innards groaned. When's the old fool going to turn up?

"I think we'd better eat," Frau Wolff hazarded quite a long time later. "Something seems to have held Hugo up."

"Well, if you really think we *ought*——"

It was wonderful. There was that soup, with potatoes both in it, and out of it, with pickles. And two or three chunks of wholemeal bread. And black coffee with a real coffee taste. Yes, it was wonderful. Elsie felt quite drowsy after it.

"You wouldn't mind if I went to bed, would you?" she asked.

"Oh, not at all." Frau Wolff was evidently rather disappointed. "I was looking forward to a nice little chat." (Like hell you are, Elsie said to herself.) "You won't even wait till Hugo comes in, maybe?"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't have much sleep last night . . . if you don't mind."

"Not at all. There'll be plenty of time for a nice little chat." (Like hell there will.) "Come, I'll take you to your little room. I hope you'll find it comfortable."

"I could sleep on a plank," said Elsie with enthusiasm.

"This way, Fraülein. *Bitte!*"

The little room was a big room. The little bed was a big bed. Everything was on that scale in the Wolff apartment.

"Have you got covers enough? You don't mind sleeping without sheets? Well, good night, Fraülein. Pleasant dreams."

Elsie was asleep in no time, but her dreams were not pleasant. They seemed to crowd in on her the moment her head touched the pillow. A terrible night in the Tivoli Theatre in Doomington, with an awful brawl going on in the pit: "Smoggy von Jew!" cried some drunken mill-hand. "Shut tha lug!" replied another, who insisted on getting his sixpennorth. They were not coconuts. They were the tops of the heads of the five Silver girls, floating on the pitchy surface of the Mitchen River. Mr. Emmanuel? The Head of an International Murder-Gang? Really, Willi! But leave his eyes in. He won't need them much longer. That tram running wild down the skiddy slopes of Stockport. Salzburg, that is. You can hear the rattle of the grave-digging machine, all the time, driving, grinding. Don't be silly, Chaim, faces are not pomegranates.

When at length she came to consciousness, and decided she was not still dreaming, she told herself almost immediately she still was; or that if she wasn't, she'd rather be. The world over from the bed-head consisted of a face, a large pale face, surrounded by a confusion of dark tawny hair. The dominant feature of the face was not the eyes, of which only a thin liquid line appeared between the heavy lids; it was the vivid mouth, the



quizzical grin about the corners of the mouth. The whole face resolved itself to that, the quizzical nightmarish grin, as much a nightmare as the phantasmagoria of her Ghetto night.

"Oh, good morning, Fraülein," said Frau Wolff. "So you're awake. Perhaps I should say good afternoon. I hope you had a good night."

She seemed absolutely fascinated by her guest, so fascinated she had not been able to pull herself away to freshen up her face, and comb her hair; and it was the sort of hair that looks dreadful if you don't comb it.

"Good morning, Frau Wolff. Yes, thank you. I had a comfortable night. Is it really so late as that? Have I slept so long?" She registered a secret satisfaction that she had apparently substantially shortened the day; so much less time to drag through till Oskar got her out of it. "I hope your husband's well," she said politely.

"Oh, Hugo's all right." Her mind was not with her husband. "He came in for a few hours, and went off just after curfew ended. You know what they are, bakers."

"Shall I get up? Can I do anything?" Frau Wolff was not the ideal bedroom companion to feast the awakening eyes on.

"I'll make you some coffee, Fraülein. Why should you worry?" The tones were the tones of the best sort of Family Boarding House, a Home from Home.

"No, really, I couldn't trouble you——"

"No trouble at all, not really." The grin still lay upon the mouth. It had not left it for an instant. It was irritating. Elsie felt she would like to iron it out with a coal-hammer.

Then suddenly Frau Wolff came clean.

"Do you know you talk in your sleep, Fraülein?"

"Do I? I suppose I do sometimes. I've had rather thin nights lately. I do hope I didn't disturb you?"

"Well, you screamed once or twice, it's true. I got a bit frightened the house-porter should hear you. But that's silly, isn't it? In this place, everybody screams in their sleep now and again. However, it wasn't the screams that worried me. It was the words."

Elsie coughed awkwardly. She didn't consider that either her conscious or unconscious thoughts were fit subjects for girls' essays in convent schools. She wondered what she'd been saying, and whom she had been saying it to.

"You were talking in English all the time, Fraülein," pointed out Frau Wolff.

"Oh, really?" Elsie opened her eyes. "Well, as a matter of fact, we always had English nurses."

Frau Wolff was too clever for that.



"No, Fraülein, no. You are English. Or maybe American. Now I come to think of it, I can hear it in your German."

"Have it your own way." Elsie shrugged her shoulders. She was not accountable to Frau Wolff, whether she was a Turk, or a Hottentot.

"I know it's not my business," conceded Frau Wolff. "But tell me—you know what a woman is—are you a journalist? Have you been sent to write a series of articles for your paper? You are. You know you are, Fraülein . . . or should I say 'Miss'?"—she chuckled knowingly—"so why should you hide it from me? I promise I won't tell a soul. Not even my husband. Won't you tell me?" she wheedled. "I'm not even asking the name of the paper. I just want to help you. The stories I could tell you, Fraülein—all right, I'll call you Fraülein—your articles would be such a success they'd want to buy the film rights." She seemed likely to go maundering on endlessly. It was clear she was the type of person who has only to tell herself a thing is true to believe it's true. And in this particular instance her discovery was so flattering to her perspicacity.

What shall I tell the damn fool? Elsie asked herself. Will it simplify things if I tell her I *am* a journalist, I'm writing a series of articles for *The Times* on both sides of the water? Like hell it will. God only knows where it will lead me to, what stories she'll dish up for me. I've had enough of the lady's stories. Besides, what the hell has it got to do with her whether I'm a journalist or a boilermaker? Lord, Lord, Oskar, the mess you've got me into! Give me the Gestapo boys any time!

"I am not a journalist," said Elsie coldly. "And I'm not an English-woman." Both statements were true. She was a German national, whether on the papers she had destroyed, or the papers that had been given her. She was not Jewish, either. She was a proved Aryan.

That's what I am.

Are you? What are you?

A speck of dust, nothing, less than nothing, circling about in the spaces where there is not even a wind, no air, no light . . .

"I'd be grateful if you'd let me get up. There's an awful taste at the back of my mouth. If you don't mind, I'll get myself a glass of water." (Just my luck, all the unpleasantness of a hangover, without any of the fun.)

"I told you. I'm making some coffee," said Frau Wolff sharply. She bounced off the bed. She was in a furious temper.

There was coffee, and there was bread, with a sort of jam smeared on it from a tin marked with a big 4. Four fruits apparently. "Four vegetables," Elsie told herself dispassionately, but she was grateful for it. For a long time Frau Wolff did not say a word. That was all right;



a little uncomfortable, but all right. Better than Frau Wolff talking. There was nothing to do but sit it out in the sitting-room. Now and again you could go to the lavatory, but that didn't help much. Most of the time you had to sit in the sitting-room, with Frau Wolff doing her embroidery, and you twiddling your fingers. She looked round for a radio. You damn fool, a *radio*! No books, nothing.

What did they *do*, the people in this Ghetto? Most of them worked, of course. She had seen them marched through the streets in files. Yes, that she had. She had been very muzzy on the way from the bakehouse to the apartment, but certainly she had seen them filing along the streets, to or from the factories. And those that didn't work in the factories? Probably they spent their time picking up their food. . . . If it was a job cashing in your food coupons in Germany, there was no doubt what a job it would be in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Didn't Frau Wolff have to go out and cash in her food coupons, for God's sake? Apparently not. After all, her husband was a baker. That meant they had bread. And if they had bread they had whatever else was going in the Ghetto.

So, apparently, all Frau Wolff had to do was to sit around and do her embroidery and wait. Probably there were a few other Frau Wolffs around the place, sitting and waiting. In fact, everything and everybody was waiting, even the people in the factories. Waiting for what? It was curiously quiet. The house was well built, so that even if people were moving about in adjoining apartments, you couldn't hear them. You couldn't hear them going up and down the staircases. There wasn't much to hear out in the streets either. Now and again, but rarely, the honk of a lorry. Now and again the rhythmic tread of marching men, the bark of a word of command . . . S.S. patrols, of course.

Everybody waiting, waiting. She, too, was waiting. She was waiting for Oskar. Would he never come? Of course he would come. She mustn't be impatient. But he mustn't come too soon; she mustn't leave too soon. Her stomach suddenly swooped inside her almost vertically, like the car in a scenic railway. She remembered his words. *It won't be for long, darling. A few days, perhaps a week or so.* A week of this? Oh, my God, could she stand it? How long had it been already? This was the second day. It felt like the second year. You can't get away, he had said, not till *he's* gone.

Had he come? Had he gone? Perhaps he wasn't coming at all? Was that what they were all waiting for? That was certainly what *she* was waiting for. And Oskar, too. Frau Wolff, too? Herr Wolff, too? The Jews in the houses, the Jews in the factories, the Jews marching, the Jews sleeping—was that what they were all waiting for?

Well, the day would come when he would have been and gone. Then



Oskar would turn up, God bless him! Not Oskar himself, of course, not in person. That would be crazy. Probably they were keeping a watch on him. He was a downy one, was Oskar. He'd be sending one of his people along to fetch her. Doubtless, everybody had "people". Willi certainly had. In the meantime, somebody would turn up with some grub, sooner or later. She'd bet a dollar to a cent that that was one of Oskar's people yesterday, hammering away at the door while she was having her bath. Her *bath*! She grimaced. Pity the fellow had to go away! She could have done with a few extra eats on the side: a small cold roast chicken, half a dozen meringues, a box of chocolate creams.

A sigh rose from deep down inside her, like a bucket coming up out of a well. It spilled in tears over the edges of her eyes.

She was aware of a hand touching her knee, a cold and flabby hand, Frau Wolff's hand.

"You mustn't worry, Fraülein," Frau Wolff was saying softly. "Yours is a dangerous job, of course it is. But my husband and I will see you through. You can depend on us."

Frau Wolff had forgiven her for not taking her into her confidence. She was a kind and understanding woman, Frau Wolff, the salt of the earth. She was a patient woman, too; she had all the time in the world. She wasn't the sort of woman who starts worrying hours in advance about the next meal. She had her embroidery. She had her visitor to talk to. She was all right.

So she started talking again.

She had forgiven Elsie. In point of fact, she hadn't anything to forgive. For Elsie had confided in her. That, apparently, was the present set-up. Elsie had told her everything about her assignment, except the unimportant details—which paper or papers she was working for, how long the articles were supposed to be, how often they were scheduled to appear, and so on.

So Frau Wolff got to work and told Elsie all about everything; all about how vulgar the *Ostjuden* were; and the ridiculous stories they told about death-trains and extermination-camps; all about Chaim and Tavele, all about gas-chambers and mass graves. In fact her tale was exactly the same as the tale she had told yesterday, with a detail omitted here, a coda added there. If the tale she told had not already proved she was stark staring mad, the fact that she could tell it again to the person she had told it to yesterday, in almost exactly the same words, proved it to the hilt. Today was as yesterday; yesterday was as the day before, and so backward for a series of deadly days. Each was identical with the other, yet completely separate from it, like the cells in a hive. She would not remember tomorrow the things she was saying, for the second time, today. Elsie wondered how Herr Wolff could have permitted himself to leave her alone with his mad



wife. . . . Or did he not know she was mad? Was he, too, mad? Were they all mad, here in this dreadful prison?

The woman went on and on, on and on. Was it possible to stop her? How? She might scream, she doubtless would scream soon. But would that stop her? Or she might go up to her and slap her cheeks and tear her hair. If she did nothing long enough, she would find the woman dead in her chair. For she would have killed her.

She was deadly serious about that. She would kill her, if it went on any longer. So at length she rose from her chair, walked out of the room and out by the front door. She was not certain whether she remembered Herr Wolf's special knock, with which she could assure her readmission. But at that moment it was not important to her she should ever have access to that place again. It was far more important to get away from that whining voice, the twisting lips, the staring eyes. She went down the stone stairway and out into the street.

She looked down at her wrist to see the time. Of course, there was no watch there. She had slipped it into her handbag, and her red-headed friend on the other side of the Wall had helped himself to it, along with her other possessions. Or, if he hadn't, it lay clogged and foul in a sewer. The shadows were lengthening. It was late afternoon, anything from five to six. She wondered where she was. Ah, there were plaques on the house-fronts; yes, they gave you a lot of information about where you were. She was on Ulica Gesia, Gesia Street. She looked along the street to her right hand, eastward. There was the Ghetto Wall, running straight and harsh, north and south. She could see the tall buildings beyond the Wall, some roofless, or quite gutted. They were not many hundreds of yards away. They were incredibly far off. The sun glinted in their windows, those that were glazed, till they looked like eyes, eyes staring down into the Ghetto with pity and contempt.

She was still wearing her little fur coat, and travelling frock and shoes—the same in which she had set out from the Salzburg chalet. Nobody had suggested she should take them off at the Wolffs'. She had slept in them. They had been very smart once. They looked like nothing on earth now. The same could be said of her face, her hair, her body. Nobody would look twice at her, except an S.S. man very hard up indeed for a bit of female; and she'd just have to keep out of his way. She'd had to keep out of the way of a large number of males in her time. She had the technique.

Where was she going to? What did she propose to do? She had no idea. She knew it was grand not being locked up within the same walls as that madwoman. What about trying to find out somewhere where Oskar's office was?



Not likely, not for a score of reasons, the least of which was that Oskar wouldn't be in his office as late as this; not if she knew Oskar. Well, I won't turn right, she told herself, and come up slap against the Wall. There's certain to be most guards round those parts. She turned left, walked to the end of the block, and found she was on a street called Zamenhofa. It was all close and stuffy, despite the bombing, which seemed to have been heavy in these parts, and should have let in a lot of air.

The houses were much taller, of course, but the streets had a curious feeling of the region she had been born in, the Longton area of Doomington, the streets of the flowering shrubs, Oleander and Magnolia, Mimosa and Lavender. It was odd she should get this feeling, for there were practically no civilians, that is to say, Jews, about. The people in the streets were S.S. men, though there were a number of men about in a sort of police uniforms who might be Jews. Of course they were Jews. They were wearing the Jew-sign on a white armlet on the right sleeve. Some of them came marching in in patrols, others seemed to come seeping in from nowhere at all. Now and again, as a group of S.S. men came up behind her or advanced towards her, she found herself hugging the wall, as a lizard does, when a shadow hangs over it. Or she withdrew silently into a doorway until the S.S. men were gone.

Apart from the marching boots it was very quiet. She had a sense of Jews behind all these walls, standing at the windows, forgathered in the cellars among their propped-up foundations. By what sense did she divine them? It was silly, it was a thought to give pleasure to the heart of Dr. Goebbels . . . but was it that she could *smell* them somehow, by some mysterious hyperaesthesia, as possibly they could smell her? This was the innermost place of the Jewish folk in Warsaw, she was certain of that; they had lived there for centuries longer than the English Jews in Whitechapel, London, or the Begley Hill Road, in Doomington. They had been born here, laboured here, tailored here, cooked here, worshipped here, died here. The smell was of black bread and salt herring, Sabbath bread sprinkled with poppy-seed, citrons for the Feast of Tabernacles, *bortch* and *kugel*, hot irons on damped suitings. She smelled them, these Jews; but how silent they were!

No, there was a tiny voice that spoke out of the wall close at hand, and from the roof-tops many streets away.

*Help! The Jews in the Ghetto of Warsaw call out for help to all the world! They are out to murder us! We ask your help!*

But what can I do? she asked. Besides, it's not true, is it? We've only got Frau Wolff's word for it. And everyone knows she's mad! It's not true, is it? It's not true!

She turned back from the wall where it ran along the northern confine



of the Ghetto, and went down Pokorna Street. At the bottom of Pokorna was a square, Muranowka, and between the square the close-ranked tenements of Nalewki.

It was when she had gone some twenty or thirty yards down Nalewki that she heard a sharp scream at no great distance behind her. She turned and saw an S.S. man dragging a woman along by her hair. The woman screamed again. The man turned and hurled his fist into the woman's mouth. She did not scream again. There was another S.S. man standing beside him. He held a baby in his hands, presumably the woman's. He held the baby before him, as if he were trying to guess its weight, as one tries to guess the weight of a chunk of beef at a meat-market. She was aware that she was observing all this, not from the street-level, where she had been a moment or two earlier, but from the depth of a dark doorway, a step or two below ground-level. A few seconds later a third S.S. man joined the two others on the pavement. He apparently had been foraging round for the stake he held in his hand, judging from his satisfied expression. He stopped, then placed the stake upright on the stone flags, as if he were about to drive it into the ground. But it was not that that happened. The S.S. man with the baby lifted it high into the air, and brought it down on to the spike and impaled it, so that a foot of metal stood up clear above the child's body.

At that instant all the pieces of the puzzle—if it had ever been a puzzle—fitted together in Elsie Silver's mind. A hideous white blinding light was switched on there. It was all true, all true, all true, death-trains and extermination-camps, gas-chambers and mass graves, Treblinka and Maidanek.

She sprang out from the doorway on to the group of S.S. men. She was yelling, spitting, clawing at their eyes.

"It's true!" she yelled—in English. "It's true! It's true! It's true! It's true!"

But before the men had time to recover their wits, another woman, a younger one, with a young man beside her, sprang out from somewhere hard by, and swept her into a dark and narrow passage.

"You crazy lunatic!" the young woman reproved her. This woman spoke Russian. "Haven't you any sense?"

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### I

HERR WOLFF disposed without trouble of Pic's body. That is to say, he flung it into the cellar. There was going to be a lot of excitement in a few hours. Nobody would notice Pic's body, if there was anybody there to notice it.



He got upstairs as quickly as might be. The two women inside there would be half dead, and more than half dead, with fright. He knocked his special knock, as usual, just to reassure them. Then he entered. Frau Wolff was in the more or less secret cupboard where she always hid herself when there was excitement.

"Come out, Saba!" he called. "It's only me, Hugo!"

She came out. She was shaking like an aspen leaf. Nobody else came out of the cupboard.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Where's the other one? Where's the Fraülein!"

"She's gone!" she nattered. "She walked out!"

"Oh hell!" He foresaw difficulties with the Food Control Officer, then almost in the same moment realized that after a few hours, or in a day or two, the point of view of Herr Straupitz-Kalmin would probably be of no interest to him.

"Why on earth did she go?"

"She's a spy!" wailed Frau Wolff. "She's a journalist!"

"Oh, so that's what she is!" he said. "Very well! We're going out! At once! Just dry your face, will you?"

"Where are we going, Hugo! I can't go out like this!"

"Where we're going," he observed, "it won't matter how you look."

It's very odd, Oskar said to himself. He looked at his watch. He's been gone two hours. That's not like Pic. I wonder what can have happened to him? He doesn't get drunk during the day-time, certainly not while he's on a job. Has he got mixed up with a beating-up patrol? That's not likely. He'd come back and report first.

Another hour went by. He got more and more uneasy.

"Christ!" he exclaimed. "What's happened to him? Somebody must go and find out! What's happened to her?"

He spent the next half-hour trying to think whether there was anybody he could send to the Wolff apartment on Gesia Street to see if his man, Pic, had been there; failing that, to see if all was well with a woman in the house, not the baker's wife, another woman. Unfortunately, he did not even know her name.

At the end of the half-hour he had made up his mind that there was no-one, no-one in his office, no-one in Warsaw, no-one in the whole world, he could trust to send on the mission.

I must go myself, he realized. It's suicide, and it's murder. But there's



nothing left for me but to go myself. If I don't go, if I slink back into Warsaw, it's murder in any case. Wolff is all right. He's honest, but he'll have his hands full. Besides, he's got a woman of his own to look after. I must look after my own woman.

Don't be an idiot, he argued with himself. You don't slink back to Warsaw. You don't slink anywhere. Every step you take is in the full glare of Gestapo arc-lights.

Tough luck, he told himself. I'm all sorts of rat. But I've got to do what I can for that woman.

As unostentatiously as a tall German could, with blue eyes, a scarred cheek, a good suit, he went round to Wolff's apartment. He had taken off his jewels, the tie-pin, the solitaire diamond ring, but that wasn't much of a disguise.

He found Wolff's place without difficulty. On the landing outside Wolff's door, there was blood. That might be Pic's, or might not. The door had been bashed about. It was wide open.

He entered.

"Wolff!" he called. "Are you there?"

There was no reply.

"Is anyone there?" he called again.

There was again no reply. He went round the apartment, examining it thoroughly. He saw the gaping door of what must have been the Wolff hide-out. There was no one there.

He went down the stairs, into Gesia Street, and turned left towards the gate near the cemetery. It was a depressing region and he felt exceedingly depressed. He had never been so mournful in all his life before.

No-one held him up anywhere in the Ghetto streets or at the gate. But the place was getting lousy with S.S. men. Something was brewing.

### III

Something was certainly brewing. That night it was at the boiling-point in certain places. It was not till next morning it boiled over.

The S.S. men had a good time. They were practically all on the job by eight o'clock, though a few Hitlerjugend lads, assigned to other duties, pleaded hard to be allowed to come in on the fun, and joined the main bodies later. From eight to ten the fun was fast and furious. Sometimes it was just that, a rifle-shot discharged for pure *joie-de-vivre*, which did, or did not, kill somebody according to whether somebody was, or was not, in the way of the bullet; a window or mirror smashed, a door or table



hacked to pieces, because of the nice noises that involved; a building set on fire, if that was done deliberately, because the flames are so pretty. And, of course, nobody can say of rape that it is anything but the highest of high spirits, unless you insist on raping a woman because she is dying, or because you have lined up her parents or children against the wall, and have warned them they will be shot if they utter a word or make a movement.

Sometimes the fun was so grim you could hardly call it fun any more, it was so calculated, whether it was robbery done expertly and meticulously, or cruelty so prolonged, or murder so flagrant. But it all went into the wash. The Jews were being "softened up" for the deportations which were to begin again next morning. They were being given a general warning, a foretaste of things to come, if the assigned deportees did not turn up at the sidings at the appointed time. They were to be made to feel that residence in the Warsaw Ghetto, apart from its over-all unpleasantness, was liable to such distressing hazards, it was perhaps even preferable to go than to stay.

The kick-off, so to speak, of the festivities was a bit hazy, though they were in full swing within a quarter of an hour after eight o'clock. But at ten o'clock to the second they stopped, such masters of organization are the German people. The S.S. men were not drunk, and had been ordered not to be. This was not the rape of a conquered city, it was, primarily, a political manœuvre, however much incidental fun it might involve.

At ten to the second it all stopped, because between the hours of ten and twelve it was known that the maximum number of Jews was herded into their dwelling-places, in the change-over time between the waking shifts. At eleven it was ordered that the house-porters should make the rounds of all the apartments in all the houses which had been designated for tomorrow's Journey. The choice had not been made this time by the Jewish Council, with the technical assistance of its Secretary. There had been some clerical hitch in the proceedings, and the authorities themselves had taken the task over, a task which presented them with no difficulty at all. Precisely at eleven o'clock, therefore, according to plan, the house-porters knocked at the doors of all rooms and apartments involved, of which the combined number of occupiers, according to the recent census, was five thousand. Some rooms and apartments opened their doors; others did not, either because the occupiers were dead, or because they were too miserable or frightened, or because they were not there. Those who opened their doors were informed that they were ordered to repair to the square over against the railway-sidings on Stawki Street, at six o'clock next morning, to entrain for the labour camps out east. Families would be allowed to travel together. No individual was allowed to take more than fifteen kilogrammes of luggage with him. They were advised to take whatever valuables they possessed, and food enough for three days.



The orders were delivered according to plan in a series of houses bounded on the south by Ostrowska and Wolynska and on the north by Niska. No comment was made by the heads of families, or whoever it might be, to whom the orders were delivered. No resistance was made by any of those Jews in the wider area in which the "softening-up" process raged.

This, too, was according to plan. For it was not only the Nazis who had a plan, but the Jews, too. And it was important that the plan should not misfire because of premature action.

The plan for next day's battle, which was not a complicated one—for it is not a complicated business to stand, and shoot, if you have a gun, and die—was largely the conception of a young man by name Michal Klepfisz, who died, as he expected to, firing the last round from his machine-gun. He was twenty-eight when he died, and looked considerably younger than his years. The Polish Government in Exile posthumously awarded him their highest decoration for valour, the *Pro Virtuti Militari*. He would have been embarrassed by that, if he had lived to receive it, but to live to receive anything would have been very definitely outside the plan. He insisted that the Russians, those that survived, must make the effort to get away, should it ever present itself, but he knew it was out of the picture that he should survive, as Adam Czerniakow knew, the first Chairman of the Jewish Council, and Avrom Godol, the Secretary, knew, and Szmul Ziegelbojm, of the Polish National Council in London, knew. These others died by their own hands, Klepfisz at the hands of the enemy. But it was the same death, in the same cause.

He would have been embarrassed to find himself acclaimed a hero; for he fancied himself more as a poet than anything else, though he was, in fact, an engineer. That was his only affectation, he fancied himself a poet, and even at the last he wore one of those open-necked shirts which young Continental intellectuals have always associated with Lord Byron and poetry. Young Klepfisz was born at Zamenhofa five, in a house no distance at all from where he died, and where the fighting raged at its toughest. From his schooldays he was a member of the *Bund*, the Social Democratic Organization, and it was largely due to his extraordinary innocence and delicacy that the various political parties in the Ghetto who continued to function, and even to wage bitter war, cohered at last in the few months that preceded the April rising into the Jewish Fighting Organization, which prepared and conducted the rising, and was only disintegrated by death itself. The political leaders, Communists, Zionists, Bundists, Polish Catholics and Russian emissaries from outside the Wall, were hard-bitten men and women, jealous of one another even in that place, in the doleful valley of the Shadow. But they could not permit themselves to go counter to the aspirations and plans of the young Klepfisz, who seems to have had



an almost Christ-like quality, which is not surprising, for the young men of Nazareth and Warsaw were of the same blood.

But there was more than innocence and delicacy in that young man, or they would not have spared him, as they did not spare one another. There was leadership; for he was immensely intelligent, swift in his intuition of ability, and he had stamina. As a lad he had been a first-class Maccab, sportsman and sports instructor; he built up a constitution behind that dreamy and almost languid exterior strong enough to withstand unimpaired the hardships of the war-time years, and to rise to the demands made upon him by the days and nights of the Battle of the Ghetto, when he neither slept nor ate, as far as anybody could see; once or twice he was induced to swallow some coffee someone had brewed, and once or twice took out of his pocket a volume of verses entitled "Anhelli", by the romantic Polish poet, Slowacki, and murmured a line or two.

This, then, was Michal Klepfisz, the hero, one of the heroes, of the Ghetto battle; to him the plan of it was largely due. And on that evening of April the nineteenth, the evening before the battle began, the word had gone forth from his headquarters deep down in the cellars that there must be no resistance. The S.S. men would pillage and burn and rape and kill, as they had done before, and as they would do again. Let them. If action was decided on, and it was, action must be organized and organic. If it was disorganized and sporadic, the pillaging, burning, raping, killing, would not be less. But the Battle, the Poem, would not come to birth, the tale that Jews, and maybe all men, would read, as they still read of Thermopylae and Jerusalem, and would read in the years to come of Dunkirk and Bataan; so long as it still interested them to read of courage against great odds.

No wonder the S.S. men, as they went around that night having their fun, said to one another: "Jews! What do you expect of the Jew-pigs? No, not pigs, sheep! At least pigs squeal! But these Jews just bleed and die!"

Next day it was not only the Jews that died.

What of the mood of the dwellers in the doomed city, the forty thousand Jews huddled in the northern rabbit-warrens, and ramifying in the branching galleries deeper down, those who had legal papers authorizing them to die in the time and place appointed by their masters? What of the ten, fifteen, twenty thousand, mostly Jews—no one knows their number—who had no papers; who had hardly any more grip on this world than thistledown anchored in the cranny of the wall? What of the mood of the rank-and-file Jews, of whom the greater part were affiliated to no organization, who were enlisted in no secret cadres of resistance? Was it the same with them as with the hundreds of thousands of Jews who, in the previous history of



the Ghetto, had climbed into the trains, or been thrust into them, and set out on the Journey from which so few returned?

It was not the same with them as with the multitudes of their predecessors; for, except for a paltry hundred or two, they did not forgather at the Stawki siding. The mood was not the same. They, too, fought the battle, as Michal Klepfisz and his band did, the one or two thousand that became thousands, as the tragic glorious days dawned and died.

There is no doubt that for a time the travellers who went forth on the Journey genuinely believed that they were going to work in labour camps behind the lines further East. The German authorities did everything they could to make them believe it; for, as is well known, on a certain plane they are intelligent, and they realize that absence of friction is better practical politics than friction. They went so far as to foster the illusion in the very forecourts of the extermination camps. The travellers, those who had survived the train, were assembled and addressed by benign gentlemen with beards and twinkling eye-glasses. But the time came when, despite their utmost efforts, a few individuals escaped from one camp and another, and began to spread abroad the true facts of the Journey. For a time the authorities sought to ridicule the accounts, by every means of propaganda at their command; and they were helped in this by the sheer impossibility of believing that such tales could possibly be true; that there were creatures that seemed human, born of human parents, parents of human offspring, that could organize and execute plans like these. It is likely that the accounts were believed sooner in the outside world than within the walls of the Ghettos themselves, for these had a further reason for refusing them credence: for it was upon their flesh and marrow, and that of their loved ones, that these devilries would be exercised. It is probable that, even till the very end, at all events on the top level of their minds, some of the dwellers in the Ghetto refused to believe these things; it is certain that some retreated into madness, where there is no cruelty nor kindness any more, nor false nor true.

But by the end of nineteen hundred and forty-two, for the most part, they knew the truth in the Warsaw Ghetto. Hence the abortive rising of January, nineteen hundred and forty-three, with the dreadful punishments that followed it. Hence the decision of Klepfisz and his associates that the next rising would not be abortive; that, though it would end in death, it would be radiant.

But why rise at all, asked many during those months, if death is so sure? There was a good deal of talking this way and that, as is the custom among Jews. Yes, the Jews talked, however hungry they were, and sick at the heart. Moreover, they were such a mixed assortment of Jews. Probably more than half were actually natives of Warsaw, kept alive because their



skill and experience provided the backbone of the Ghetto industries, which were so useful to the Nazi war-effort and so profitable to its organizers. The scholars, the artists, the teachers, and latterly the doctors, too, were eliminated without scruple, for these had no function in the new Nazi establishment.

In addition to these native working-men were Polish Jews of all classes, who had either fled in the path of the armies and found themselves trapped here, or had been herded into the Warsaw Ghetto as other ghettos were liquidated, for more convenient handling while the plans for extermination were worked out.

And finally there was a large company of non-Poles, Jews from Germany, Holland, Belgium, France and other occupied territories. The language most commonly spoken was Yiddish, which both Polish Jews and the Jews captured in Soviet regions had in common. Many of the West and North European Jews could either speak it, or quickly get into the way of it, for they remembered their parents discoursing in that tongue over their cradles. As for the Germans, many of them did not speak Yiddish, they had a certain contempt for it; but the German-speakers and the Yiddish-speakers could converse without difficulty; there is enough in common between the two tongues.

The Jews talked.

Said Ben Slonimski, a Polish Jew, to Zcharyeh Levin, a Lithuanian Jew, who worked beside him in a small factory that turned out whips and riding-crops:

"I don't understand why they're thinking of fighting. What good will they do by fighting? There's only one thing for us all to do, Zcharyeh, and that is to lie down and die. By all I mean not Jews only, but Germans, too, and Russians, and English, and Americans, and Argentinians, and Laplanders, all, all the whole human race."

"But why do you say such a wicked thing, Ben?"

"Because I *am* wicked. Because the whole human race is wicked. I was a lawyer. I looked deep into the human heart, and I know there's nothing but wickedness there. I had a wife once, and three small children. They were black with wickedness. Thank God they're all dead."

"You say—thank God. So you believe in God, then?"

"I believe in God, yes. He is the God of Wickedness. Why shouldn't He be the God of Wickedness, instead of the God of Goodness you believe in? Or do you still believe in a God of Goodness, here in Warsaw, in Lubeckiego Street? Isn't it mathematically likely He is all wickedness as that He is all goodness?"

"I don't know any longer what I believe in, Ben. But if you still believe in God, Ben, do you say prayers to Him?"



"Each night when I lie down on my plank bed, I pray to Him I shall die during the night."

"But perhaps it's more exciting to die fighting than to die sleeping?"

"If you fight, it's possible you might even escape dying. I think that's a bad thing. Let us all die. First the Jews will be all dead. Then, when the Germans will have seen it is possible to kill six million men in this Continent, they will turn on the Poles; later, the Belgians, the French. By that time the Western peoples will have gathered their strength together. They will not be killed, like Jews, or Hollanders. They will kill instead, and be killed. It will be the beginning of the end of the final killing. This animal called Man will be dead like other animals before him, the brontosaur and the dinosaur."

"Why don't you take your life, Ben, like Shloime did yesterday, and my daughter, Tilly, last week?"

"Because I'm no good. Because I'm a coward."

"What will you do if there is fighting?"

"I'll turn my ribs wherever there are bullets flying, whether Jews shoot them or Germans."

"It's coming soon. I'll say good-bye to you now, Ben."

"Good-bye, Zcharyeh."

And so it was with Ben Slonimski, the little lawyer from Lvov, when the bullets started flying at eleven on the morning of April the twentieth. He was one of the first to die.

Said Peter Fulner to Diana, his sister (they had lived in Frankfurt, the children of a well-to-do banker; they loved each other dearly):

"I am against the fighting, *Liebchen*."

"If you don't fight, I shan't; though what good would we be fighting, you and I?" asked Diana.

And, indeed, it seemed strange that they could go on existing, these two, their skin was so like a petal-thin oriental manuscript in a glass case, and you felt that if once they submitted to a movement of air, however slight, they must fall apart. They had been separated from each other, and it was only the knowledge that mystically, miraculously, they must meet again before they died, that enabled them to persevere with the task of living. They had found each other again, here in Warsaw. They were like a blue-grey smoke. The eye hardly noted them. They were clever with their fingers; in their own home they had devised cunning toys out of ivory. So they had not been sent away on the Journey, and so, from month to month, they did not die.

"For, of course, the Jews have lived too long, Diana," he said. "Isn't that true? Perhaps we should have disappeared from the earth about the



time of the conversion of the Emperor Constantine. We had then lived longer than most of our competitors, and we had already learned from the peoples that survived, and the new peoples that were coming to birth, how unloved we are. I would say we had outstayed our welcome, excepting that history doesn't record who welcomed us, and where, excepting, maybe, during the Empire of the Caliphate, in the tenth and eleventh centuries. We have never had any self-love, like many of the Gentile peoples; we have always loved others more than ourselves, but it has availed us little."

The girl looked down sadly.

"You would have had the tale of the Jews end so long ago?" she asked. "So long ago? And all the centuries that have been since then, would you rather they had not been? That Spinoza, and Mendelssohn, and Heine, and Bergson, and Einstein, and our own dear Kafka, had not been?"

He smiled.

"Well, let's say until the time called till now the Dark Ages. The Dark Ages, *Liebchen*! A funny phrase to be using, Diana, here in the Warsaw Ghetto, in the tenth year of the reign of our Reichskanzler. I spoke to you of the Empire of the Caliphate just now. At that time there was a truce between Islam and Jewry, and between us we built a lovely civilization on the northern shores of Africa and the Spanish plateaux. Even in Christian France they caught the infection of this tolerance, and Jewish philosophers and Jewish merchants and Jewish doctors were very *à la mode*. But it was in the Spain of the Caliphs that Jewish felicity reached its zenith. 'That garden of Eden,' said the old Jewish writers, 'that earthly paradise,' they said.

"Then, the old serpent, the new serpent, the deathless serpent, rears and strikes again. The year is ten hundred and sixty-six, the place is Granada. The cry is raised . . . *Verrecke Juda!* . . . you remember the night we first heard it, you and I, at Uncle Natan's, on the beach beside his house at Schwannenwerde? . . . clear and deadly all the way from Granada?"

"If you insist, I'll give you till year ten hundred and sixty-six. But not a decade longer, not a year. The first crusade is almost due. The hounds are already baying in Germany and France and England. By what right can the world demand from us a Meyerbeer or a Freud or an Ehrlich? At what cost? It is we who paid the price, with oceans of blood and hills of corpses, century beyond century. The price has been too much to pay. Let us declare the house empty. Let them raze the house to the ground."

"Do you think God loves us, as mother used to say, and for that reason has so chastized us?"

"Diana, no." The light went quite out of his eyes. "I think our mother was wrong. I think the mortal sin of our people has been its dreadful tenacity. We were wicked to hold on so long. If in this last millennium we married at all, we should have married outside the Jewish fold; we should



have sought to disappear like streams hurrying to the sea. We are not loved by God. It is very clear to me that if He had any tolerance for us, let alone love, He would not have sanctioned . . . all this." He meant the factory they were working in, the empty bread-shop half-way down the street, the barbed-wire fencing at the foot of it, the trains that sooner or later would load up again at Stawki, the worse than ghoulis things beyond.

"We are not loved by God, Diana. It is a good thing that that does not discourage me from loving you, and you from loving me. I would like that to go on till the very end. If there is to be fighting, *Liebchen*, I trust we will not be torn from each other. If we were, each of us might be enflamed into fighting. I say: No, Diana. We are Jews, and therefore we should lie down and die."

"It will be easier to die with you, Hansl, than away from you."

"I am proud you say that, Diana."

"Kiss me, Hansl!"

There was a Jew turned Christian who spoke. He was on his knees, and it was not to another human he spoke, but to Jesus Christ nailed upon a Cross, in the Church of San Borromeo.

"And we shall fight, Lord Jesus, as You fought. And, as You were crucified among men, so are we being crucified among peoples, and shall be crucified. And as You rose from the dead, so shall we rise from the dead."

"And if the vinegar be sour, and if the wounds of the nails be keen, did you not also say: 'My Lord, my Lord, why hast Thou forsaken me?'"

"But You, Lord Jesus, have not forsaken us. And we shall rise again on the third day, and be again as of old time, a witness to all mankind of Your Kingdom, and Your Power, and Your Glory. Amen, amen!"

There was a puzzled young man named Irving M. Horowitz, who had been born in Brooklyn, had been educated at the College of the City of New York, and had had a job in Stockholm wished on him, by some important and powerful second cousin. Irving will open up a branch in Stockholm, said the important cousin a year before the war, and sell our electric irons, toasters and other gadgets for us. Irving had no wish to sell electric gadgets in Sweden. He wanted to be a Welfare Superintendent in a Y.M.H.A. and teach Jewish boys how to box and play ball; he wanted to marry a nice Jewish girl named Ray, who was also interested in Welfare Work and teaching Jewish girls how to play basket-ball.

"But you can marry Ray later," said the important cousin, to whom the whole family kow-towed exceedingly, "after you've opened up the new branch and made some money and become a credit to the family."

So Irving went to Stockholm, where he was a complete failure; and it



turned out that Ray was not such a nice girl, after all, for she married another boy from C.C.N.Y., who already had a lot of money without having to go to Stockholm to make it. And Irving stayed on in Scandinavia, where the fellows were husky like himself, and liked long-distance swimming and ski-ing, as he did. He was fine at both.

When the Nazis occupied Norway, it occurred to him he might be useful, after all. There were a number of Jews in Norway who were all ear-marked for German concentration-camps. So he got to work and started a small organization for smuggling them over the Swedish frontier. It involved a lot of everything he was good at, ski-ing, long-distance swimming, hiking, and if the whole thing couldn't be described as Welfare Work, what could?

He had a good heart, a husky frame, but he was not very clever. And the Nazis finally caught him. His country was not yet at war with Germany, and possibly that was why they did not shoot him. He carried Norwegian papers, so they let it stand he was a Norwegian, and they exported him to a labour camp in Brandenburg. It was all very bewildering, because he wasn't a Norwegian, and he did not see why he should make roads for the Nazis. He escaped, and they caught him again. They treated him roughly, and after various ups and downs they put him in a train which ended him up in the Warsaw Ghetto. He was told by the secret planners there would be a chance of fighting, but not where or when, because he was not too smart, and the fewer facts he carried about with him the better.

Down in the cellar they took the handkerchief off his eyes.

"Will you fight?" they said.

Irving was not one of the loquacious Jews, for he uttered one word, of one syllable, though he said it twice over. As he uttered it, for the first time in all the years since he had left Brooklyn, the bewilderment went completely out of his eyes.

"Fight!" he shouted, and flakes fell away from the damp plaster of the vaulted roof. He struck his clenched fist on the wall beside him. A tendon came out on the side of his forehead, that seemed to swing to and fro like a fiddle-string. "Fight!" he said again, and drew a deep breath, as if he had been submerged in deep water for a long time, and had that instant come to the surface.

"All right!" the Boy nodded. (That was the way they spoke of the leader, Klepfisz, down there.) There was no handkerchief round the American's eyes when he left.

There were tailors, pressers, button-hole hands, fellers, cutters.

"Fight?" they asked. "What a question, fight? We should sit down on our behinds, perhaps, and play draughts?"



"Perhaps even to play draughts we haven't got strength," said some. "So fight, he says, like blowing his nose."

"*Mishkosheh*. If the Lord wants we shall fight, we shall fight. And the Lord wants."

The Chassidim sent delegations to ask the Wonder-Rabbi what his view was. The delegations were graciously permitted into the presence by the first *Bocher*, the chief disciple, Reb Yizchok Perlmutter.

"Shush! Sha!" went Reb Yizchok, shooing away the interlopers who had no right to be there—who, in fact, were not there. "This way to the Great Miraculous One!"

The Great Miraculous One would often keep the delegations waiting, sometimes for only minutes, sometimes for whole hours, at a stretch. For he might be engaged in prayer, or in communion with Beings that sometimes seemed to be within his own breast, sometimes outside himself, in the corners of the room or up against the ceiling. He would address them as if they were as much carnally there as the visitors; now and again his face would be wreathed in smiles, and you might hear him chuckling, like a thrush in a far-off tree. At length he would remove himself from the Presences, and become aware of the people before him. The eyes would be alert and direct.

"What have my children come to ask from me?" he would ask. And they would speak, and he would nod his head, and when they had finished he would lean back, and close his eyes, and talk to them. When the audience was over, the inquirers were never in any doubt at all about the advice he gave them. "Fight!" the meaning was. "Fight and live, or do not fight and die!"

But his words were the words of Kabbala, full of cloudy symbols shot through with fire; or like a primeval forest hung with curtains of greenery. He talked of the Angel of Death, how Israel had gained ascendancy over him, the day Israel had accepted the Torah on the summit of Mount Sinai. For the Lord had said to the Angel of Death: "Continue to hold sway over the rest of the earth, but not over this nation that I have chosen as my people." Therefore it was, murmured the Wonder-Rabbi, that David the King had spent the whole of every Sabbath day in the study of the Torah, that he might secure himself against the Angel of Death, who hath not power to slay a man whilst he is occupied with the fulfilment of God's commandments. Is it not written that when the Angel of Death came down from heaven to take Elijah from earth, he found Elijah and Elisha so immersed in pious argument that he could not attract their attention, and so, his errand unfulfilled, he had to return whence he came?

Is it not written, said the old man, that while sitting under the oak of



Mamre, our father Abraham, perceiving a streak of light and smelling a sweet smell, turned and beheld the Angel of Death coming towards him in much glory? And the Angel said: "Do not believe, Abraham, that this beauty is mine own, and that I come thus to every man. And Abraham said to him: "And art thou indeed the Angel that is called Death?" And he answered: "I am the bitter name." But Abraham answered: "I will not go with thee." And the Angel of Death revealed his corruption, showing two heads, the one had the face of a serpent, the other head was like a sword. And the servants of Abraham, looking at the fierce face of the Angel of Death, died, but Abraham sang praises to the Lord, and He raised him up.

Further and further the old man mounted upon his empyrean spiral, discoursing of the Angels that passed before the Lord, the angel of the water, the angel of the rivers, the angel of the mountains, the angel of the hills, the angel of the abysses, the angel of the deserts, the angel of the sun, the angel of the moon, the angel of the Pleiades, the angel of Orion, the angel of the herbs, the angel of the wild beasts, the angel of the locusts, the chief angel of the angels, the chief angel of the cherubim, the chief angel of the ofanim. . . .

Then at length, so far was the Rabbi withdrawn, his voice was inaudible, there was no flutter of movement in lip or eyelid. And at length, long after, his spirit retraced the spiral, and came down so low as the mountain-tops, then lower, to the rivers, and the cities, and this city which was Warsaw, and his Residence there. And now he was speaking once again. The suppliants craned their heads towards him and listened fearfully:

"Go, my children, go!" he murmured. "And may the blessing of the Lord shine upon you, and the light of His countenance be upon your ways!"

Said Laban Symplak, Chairman of the Fighting Committee of the Polish Zionist Central Council: "Because you know, friends, that every blow we strike is a blow for Zion. They will hear about the things we did and the way we died, in the cafés of Telaviv and the orange-groves of Deganieh, in the refineries of Jericho and in the pastures of Esdraelon and Galilee. They will know that it is for them we died, and that will be true. But they will also hear about it in London, among the poor men of White-chapel and the rich men of Hyde Park. In Chicago they will hear about it, in Buenos Ayres, in African gold-mines and in shipping-offices in Sydney, Australia. They will say: It means something, after all, this Zion that our forefathers dreamed of for two thousand years. It was not only a breath of words when they cried: *Next year in Jerusalem!*

"So they, too, will work for Zion, and, if needs be, die for it. And it is our part to show them the way. Many of us lived happily enough in the past, before the blackness came down on the world. It was not as happily



as it might have been, for we did not reach Zion. But now—it may be in a month or two, or in a week or two—we shall see the walls and the towers, only a few blocks away beyond Franciskanska. The Wall of the Ghetto will be like a web of gossamer. The Wall of our own City stands high up on a hill. We shall stand by the Wall of Weeping, but we shall not weep.

“We fight, friends. Do I take it as agreed that we fight?”

The motion to fight having been duly proposed and seconded, was then carried unanimously by the Fighting Committee of the Polish Zionist Central Council.

There were Polish “Aryans”, down there in the cellars, both before the fighting and during the fighting. They brought arms continuously to the beleaguered fighters until there were no more hands to grasp them, or until it was quite impossible to use the inlets to the drainage system into which they descended with their loads. For the Germans had sharp eyes. The Poles fought because they wished to kill Germans, wherever Germans might be killed. They thought that the Warsaw Ghetto was as good a place as any other to kill Germans. Besides, they thought of Polish Jews only as Poles, exactly as many of the Polish Jews themselves did. This was a battle against the odious enemy, who had ravaged their farm-lands and destroyed their cities. Death to the Germans, the Poles said. A lieutenant in the Polish Army, whom they called “Artur”, was high in the councils of the Jewish Fighting Organization, one of the closest associates of Klepfisz. It was “Artur” who was largely responsible for the tactics they deployed down there, the correlation between the fighting in the secret and the open places.

There were “Aryan” Germans down there. Some were deserters from the army. They were deserters from the army not because they were cowards, but because they no longer believed in the things their army was fighting for. It seemed in their eyes there was no longer any distinction between army and Party. It was Germany, they said, that they were fighting for. They well knew that if they had come to this way of thinking some years earlier they would have died in concentration-camps. If they were caught now they would be stood up against a wall and shot. Why not die fighting for the Germany that once was, they asked themselves, the philosophers, the musicians, the noble towns, the lovely villages, the painted inns of Bavaria, the gabled roofs of the Baltic sea-cities? So these Germans died, fighting.

Some were Communists, to whom their race or the creed of their parents was of secondary importance; as it was with the Polish Communists who were already there, and with the Russian Communists who had been sent



over to take their stand beside them. The instructions were: Fight! And they fought.

But, for the most part, the folk in the Warsaw Ghetto fought because it seemed the decent thing to do, hungry though they were, and exhausted unto death. They might have stood out earlier against the ignominy of these deportations, the sapless milling in the assembly square, the herding in the lime-caked trucks, if a Jewish Fighting Organization had been formed earlier out of these different, and often conflicting, elements. But they got to work at last, Klepfisz and Artur and Berel and Symplak and the rest, and when the two or three thousand fought, the ten and twenty thousand did not hold back.

It is the decent and the sensible thing, they thought. It will draw the attention of the Great Allied Powers to the situation we Jews are in, both native and foreign Jews, assembled here in the Polish ghettos. The attempt is being made to "liquidate" some millions of Jews. More than half of these have already been liquidated. It looks as if the rest will follow. The enemy are merely working out a technique, by which other peoples, other races, may be eliminated even more efficiently and economically.

The Allies will do something, they thought, nobody was quite clear what. Perhaps the Russian campaign would be speeded up, and the day of the Invasion of Western Europe advanced. Perhaps it would be proclaimed that unless these mass liquidations ceased, one small German town after another, after another, would be wiped out from the air. Perhaps His Holiness the Pope and the rulers of all neutral states might intercede with the powers ruling Germany.

Their expectations were not gratified, of course, and some died racked with bitterness. But, for the most part, those who had ideas of this sort lost sight of them during the days that followed. They were sustained by other consolations.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### I

By nine o'clock on the morning of April the twentieth there were not more than some three hundred Jews assembled in the square over against the Stawki sidings. It was the anniversary of Herr Hitler's birthday, and the consignment of five thousand Jews was, in one of its aspects, designed to be a birthday-present for the German leader, of a type he appreciated more than any other.



The three hundred Jews on Stawki were, therefore, a sorry disappointment to a number of people. Intrinsically they were very little to write home about. They were shadows, both in the body and the spirit. They were afraid to stay, afraid to go, afraid to live or die. They were so unsubstantial that it must have been only by some caprice of the wind, of a door opening or shutting, that they finally decided to make that brief enormous journey between their houses and the square. It is true they had bags packed for the Journey. But so had many hundreds of others, who did not go; probably they thought it tactful to produce the impression they were going. The three hundred who had turned up were the sort of ghost workers whom Tania Polednikova had chanced upon when she came in search of Berel, the communist leader. But there were others, as that young woman had quickly learned.

The first train had been drawn up for an hour or two at the sidings. The other train would draw up in its place after the first had been loaded up and despatched. It would be a lengthy process, the coaling and watering, the loading up and shunting, but it would be Jews who would stand about waiting for hours and hours, and that didn't matter to anyone.

However, there were not Jews enough to load up even one-fifth of the first train by the time six o'clock had come round. There was an S.S. Oberscharführer in charge, with two Sturmmänner, a couple of dozen Yunaks and some scores of Jewish policemen. But the Jewish policemen, like the Jewish passengers, were well below strength. The S.S. men scowled. The Yunaks swung their cudgels. And by six-thirty there were still only three hundred Jewish passengers there, and by six-forty-five, and by seven o'clock.

The train coughed and wheezed. The noises it made had almost a human quality. Chuff! Chuff! What's all this about? Do you know what train I am? I am the Death-Train. Chuff! Chuff! I'm not in the habit of being kept waiting. Somebody'll pay for this! Chuff! Chuff!

The three hundred Jews wilted like poorly rooted plants in a blast from the desert. They had their bags beside them. They were tired. They would have liked to sit down.

"Stand up there! Stand up!" yelled the Yunaks, bringing their cudgels down on their thin bodies. So they stood up, their heads lying limp over their collar-bones.

"Stand up! Stand up!" yelled the Jewish policemen. But they were shouting in the way that a frightened dog barks. They knew the game was up. They knew they would have to pay for this, just as much as any little Jewish workman who should have turned up this morning, and had not.

"*Die verfluchten Schweinehunde!*" the S.S. men ground out between their teeth. They were angry not only because the Jews had not turned up, but because the Jews had made them look such fools. Their faces were



hot with their humiliation. The humiliation would not last long, of course. The goddam swine would pay for it, with heavy interest. In the meantime, the Jews had made fools of them. *Die unerhörte Frechheit*, the unparalleled cheek!

The trouble was it was difficult to decide how much rope to give them. The swine should have been here not at six, but before six; certainly not five minutes past six. Yet it was after seven o'clock, and they were not here yet. Was it possible there had been some technical hitch?

"Hi, you there!" yelled the Oberscharführer. "Yes, you, Jew! What time were you told to be here this morning?"

"At six o'clock, sir!"

"Six o'clock, eh?" the Oberscharführer yelled. "Six o'clock!" He took a flying kick with that superbly polished riding-boot at the creature who had answered him; the Jew landed on the pavement flags like a bundle of dirty washing. That was a sort of signal. Everybody there was by now in a thoroughly bad temper, except the Jews, who were merely three-quarters dead. So they took it out on the three hundred, male or female, old or young. They brought up their boots and brought down their truncheons, the Oberscharführer heaving in as lustily as the rest. They did not shoot. They wanted to increase, not to cut down, the numbers of the intended passengers.

The railway officials down here at the sidings, and further back at the Dantziger Station, were getting very restive.

"What the hell's wrong here?" they wanted to know. "When are we going to load up? We were told to find trucks for five thousand head. We're blocking the whole outfit! We can't bring the goods-trains in. Someone's messed things up, and it's not us!"

At seven-forty-five there were already people around who'd heard direful mutterings in Gestapo House. Somebody was for it. Why us? Why are we to blame? It's the damned Jews, and the twice-damned Jewish policemen. We always thought it a mistake to have these Yids around, pretending they are as good as human beings. Better get through to H.Q. before H.Q. comes down on us. God damn it!

A railway-clerk was trying to attract the Oberscharführer's attention.

"What do you want, man? What? H.Q. wants to have a word with me? O.K., man! Why didn't you say so at once!"

He went over to the telephone-box.

"Heil Hitler! Hello, yes! This is Oberscharführer Gebhardt, S.S. Kommando, Stawki Street sidings! Oh, it's you, Herr Müller! Yes, sir, yes, I'm afraid that's true! Sir? Not more than three hundred all told! Yes, Herr Müller, it's scandalous, unparalleled! Wash it all out? How do you mean, sir, wash it all out?"



"I mean exactly what I say, you good-for-nothing imbecile! I mean wash it all out! Clear the siding! Hold it all up till tomorrow! They'll be there tomorrow, you can rely on that!"

"Yes, Herr Müller!"

"Oh, and by the way——"

"Yes, sir?"

"Those three hundred you've got over there—rub them up, shoot them, do what you damn well like with them!"

"Yes, sir! The cemetery's very convenient, sir, as you know! Yes, Herr Müller?"

"You will be held accountable for the contents of the suitcases! No monkey-business!"

"No, Herr Müller!"

"Heil Hitler!"

"Heil Hitler!"

Herr Müller sat chewing at his cigar, till it looked like a piece of seaweed. He knew he had to think and act quickly. Was he going to report the matter, or was he not, to his superior, Kurt Hinze, Gestapo Chief, Warsaw Area? He would immensely have preferred not to. He would rather have settled the matter off his own bat.

The non-appearance of the Jews was a piece of insolence so frantic that Müller almost felt the crown of his skull working loose. He felt it as a purely personal insult. He would have his own back. For the present he must keep himself absolutely in hand. No cognac, even; cognac merely made you feel good; it didn't help you to see things clearly.

How the hell had it happened? How did approximately five thousand Jews, lumps of matchwood, paper bags—how was it they had permitted themselves to disobey his orders—and today of all days, the Führer's birthday, the day when Himmler was scheduled to turn up? Whore's bones!

That secret organization of theirs was at the bottom of it . . . ha! ha! *secret!*—as if anybody could keep anything from him, Otto Müller! The Jewish Fighting Organization? He'd give them fight! He'd give them organize! He even knew the names of their leaders—their present names, at all events. There was "the Boy"; there was Berel the Communist. There was even a Pole among them, a Polish officer, Artur! Fancy stooping so low as to lead a rabble of Jews! A Pole, what would you expect? He always said a Pole was half-way to a Jew.

The mob couldn't be more than two or three hundred strong, probably not so strong as they were in January. The lousy Poles had probably been keeping them alive with extra rations. At all events the others, the tens of thousands of them, were so much nearer being dead.



Well, he had to make an example of these Jews once and for all. They didn't like the idea of the train, eh? There'd be five thousand fewer Jews by this time tomorrow, anyway, whether they went on a Journey, or their houses were burned down about their ears. It would save coal for the engines. The Jews themselves would be their own coal.

What equipment had they to deal with the matter inside the Ghetto? Under the command of his good friend, Klempert, S.S. Sturmbannführer, their own S.S. men, including the Yunaks, numbered some four hundred and eighty men, eight sections of sixty, based on their S.S. barracks in Leszno. Each section had two five-ton lorries for their infantry, and twenty B.M.W.s, motor-bicycles with side-cars, armed with machine-guns. There were several staff-cars, Klempert's and his own, big Mercédès-Benzes, almost armoured cars. There was the Jewish Police Force, or a remnant of it. He spat at the thought of them.

Was that enough for the job? Almost certainly. But one mustn't take risks, of course. He recalled that regrettable business in January, when there had been all that fighting in the region of the Zamenhofa gate along Niska Street. The fighting had gone on for several days. At the end they had to bring tanks up to reduce the buildings where the Jews still held out. It had not been enough to set fire to the buildings where the Jews still held out. It had not been enough to set fire to the buildings the Jews had barricaded. There were still Jews holding out amid the rubble and flame. Some sixty Germans had been killed! Sixty! The impertinence! It mustn't be allowed to happen again. It needed a bigger show of force than they had at their disposal in the Ghetto. God damn it, he'd have to get in touch with Witzleben, over at Gestapo H.Q.

Was there any chance of H.Q. letting them handle the whole job, with some reinforcements from outside? Like Hell there was! He knew Witzleben, and his S.S. boy friend, Gruppenführer Hinze.

What about taking the matter in their own hands? A sudden brilliant descent on the region between Zamenhofa and Nalewki? That was where the rats were at their strongest, down there, in that rabbit-warren of sewers. He and Klempert between them would let them all see what leaders of real resource and guts could do! That would show Witzleben where he got off!

But he knew it was no good. It was as much as his head was worth if there was a slip-up. You might need heavier stuff than those machine-guns for the sewers. He'd have to ring up Witzleben. And without a shadow of a doubt Witzleben knew already. He'd better get that call put through.

Witzleben was polite, even friendly. He normally had a tongue like a potato-grater.

"The matter's already in hand, Müller; I've been conferring with Gruppenführer Hinze. We were just about to get through to you. Fine



how-d'you-do it is! Just when we're expecting the Old Man. No, he's not here yet. Not on the *telephone*"—the voice was a trifle more acid—"he must be held up somewhere.

"Never mind. We'll still let the Führer have his birthday present. Listening? I want Klempert to get everything together, everything you've got. Hold it on the alert. No, not the goddam Jewish policemen. Shoot them! We've got it all sketched out already. Yes, already, Müller. Your men are not to spare anybody or anything. Got that? Send Klempert along at once to thrash it out. Let's teach the swine once and for all!

"You have my sympathy, Müller. It must be most upsetting for you. Don't worry. We'll have it all ironed out by nightfall. We're not going to make any of the mistakes we made in January. We'll have dinner together, shall we, at the Bristol? I have a nice little bunch of sweeties on tap. And how about a magnum of your special Napoleon brandy? Fine! See you soon! Heil Hitler!"

Herr Müller's eyes were almost starting out of his head. He looked as if he would have an apoplectic fit any moment. At last the pulses stopped knocking in his temples.

"He's getting ready to have me kicked out," he muttered. "The crafty bastard! He's a Jew. That's what he is!" His heart jumped, as if he really believed he had got on to something. He took out another cigar, then yelled for his cognac.

"And put Sturmbannführer Klempert through at once!" he added.

"Drunken sot!" said Herr Witzleben to S.S. Gruppenführer Hinze. "I'll swear to it! Ah, here they are!" His staff officers, Sturmhauptführer Tegern and Obersturmführer Blech, had arrived. They got out the large-scale map of the Ghetto. They considered the situation.

"I don't intend to exaggerate the importance of this," said Hinze. "They're on their last legs and a whiff of small-shot will blow them down. But there's a core of hard resistance which will need tackling, the Jewish Fighting Organization. We'll take no chances. I've always thought the mistake in January was that we sent forces in at one point only. Here." The pencil demonstrated the central gate in the northern part of the Wall, at Zamenhofa. "I propose to send out two detachments, one to enter here, at the Nalewki gate. That's undoubtedly where the heart of the trouble is. A frontal attack, as it were. That force will assemble in full sight of the Ghetto buildings over in Krasinski Square. It will hold the attention of the Fighting Organization, and give the others a sense of what's coming to them. The other force will assemble here, on the north side of Szczesliwa, taking every precaution to remain unseen behind Karen's here, the big furniture stores. They will execute attack from the flank. I propose to commit



the same number of men as Klempert has inside there, but with a good deal heavier equipment. The motor-bicycle machine-guns will spear-head the attacks and shoot up everything in sight. They will be followed by the armoured cars, two per section. The lorried infantry will mop up. As for Klempert, he'll take up positions in the rear at various strategic bends and corners, as he works it out, Smocza, Gesia and elsewhere. He'll be here in a few minutes. Inform the various section-leaders, gentlemen. Zero hour eleven a.m."

"Herr Gruppenführer," began the Sturmhauptführer. "You will recall that in January it was not until the tanks were brought up——"

"Tanks will not be necessary," snapped Gruppenführer Hinze. "You have your orders, Herr Sturmhauptführer."

## II

At eleven o'clock precisely the klaxon-horns on Hinze's motor-bicycles raised a howl like half hell in torment; the machines raced roaring through the open gates, the armoured cars came in tremendously after them. Inside the Ghetto Klempert's men were met by an instantaneous volley of rifle and machine-gun bullets. Hinze's machines were allowed to penetrate some two hundred yards or more into the Ghetto streets; then death came crackling down at them from upper-storey windows and from between the iron bars of cellar-gratings. Out of dark doorways fighters rushed with hand-grenades, flung them deadlily, withdrew again into the doorways.

Then, for one moment, the Jewish rifles at the windows stopped barking, the Jewish machine-guns stopped stuttering. A taunt more deadly than hot lead thrust five hundred tongues out from five hundred windows. Flags fluttered and flaunted, the white and red flag of Poland, the red flag of Moscow, the blue and white flag of Zion. Uniquely fresh and gay the flags looked, ripping and crackling in the brisk air, thrust through casements blackened with smoke and pitted with shrapnel-holes. It seemed as if a signal had been sounded for carnival, and with louder drums than customary, carnival would be duly celebrated.

As for the S.S. commander, if Hinze had hoped for surprise, at all events from the force that penetrated by Stawki, there certainly was none. The surprise was all on the other side. For some moments the Germans were flung into the most painful confusion. Motor-bicycles lay kicking and spluttering on the pavements. German dead lay about, as completely dead as Polish or Jewish corpses. German wounded crawled and rolled towards a shelter that would not shelter them. Armoured cars, humped over to one side in the shock of explosion, blazed like torches.



The Germans are good soldiers, of course. In a couple of minutes, or probably less than that, the Germans had recovered from their surprise. The guns in the armoured cars that had not been knocked out were firing away into those rooms and doorways from which the Jewish enemy had been firing. Where a motor-cyclist had survived and his machine had not, he was crouched in what shelter he could find, and was firing all he had until a bullet from above, behind, below, despatched him. The lorried infantry had come up and those men that had survived the fusillade had been discharged into doorways, passages, up and down stairways.

The fighting was desperate and deadly. But it was more deadly for the Germans; they were visible, their enemy were not, until at last a bedroom or cellar door was smashed open, and there the creature was, man, woman, child even, Jew, Pole, Russian—there the creature was, clear-eyed, exalted. This first flurry in the Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto lasted some three quarters of an hour, and did not penetrate for many blocks beyond the two gates where the entrance had been made. The defence was coolly and ably disposed. The fighting was over sooner in the rear on Gesia and Smocza, where Klempert was in charge from his staff-car well in the lee of a blank wall. There was nothing for Klempert to do but to order the retreat towards his headquarters on Leszno. In the first withering fusillade he had lost one third of his men. Hinze's losses in Zamenhofa and Nalewki were more serious, far more serious than they were to be again during the prosecution of the battle, as the disparity between the strengths of the opposed forces became more and more overwhelming. There would be no immediate recovery, Hinze realized, from the blow inflicted on him by the initial surprise. It was extremely difficult to estimate his losses on the spot, but two hundred seemed a fair estimate. It was impossible to reassess the situation there and now. Two of the armoured cars were still blazing away at Jewish strongholds, and knocking them to pieces. But what was the good of that? As soon as the places became untenable, the Jews withdrew along their secret lines of communication. It was getting him nowhere.

He ordered the retreat.

"I'll be back!" he scowled. "And soon!"

### III

That day in Warsaw was bright and genial, despite the north wind that gave the air a slight tang. The air had a sense rather than a scent of opening blossom. The trees in the ravaged boulevards were shining as if the wind were water. The opening leaves of the sycamores in the squares were bronzy-red. The leafing willows by the river-bank were emerald. Birds were



chirping and chattering in tree-tops, as if there were no Germans in Warsaw, and no Ghetto there with a Wall round it.

Then from the north the wind brought another note. There was the machine-gun rattle as of chains going over blocks, and almost at once the sound of heavier guns. The errand-boy on his bicycle stopped pedalling a moment; the housewife paused over her stew-pot; the doctor moved his ear from his patient's symptoms; the priest and the nun turned their heads from the altar-steps.

"The Jews," the profane murmured, "up there in the Ghetto! The poor devils!" Or: "The poor Jews! Christ, save them!" the pious murmured. Or they said, with a shrug of the shoulders: "The Jews again! Well, what do you expect? They had it coming to them!"

The north wind did not stop blowing. It was not now a sense or scent of opening blossom it carried, but the whiff of gunpowder and burning wood. And not that only. The wind carried news. The news was there, somehow, not many minutes after the first Jewish bullets whined from the windows, the first hand-grenade burst like puff-balls against their targets, the first flags unfolded like brave flowers.

"The Jews are fighting back! Bravo, Jews! Let 'em have it! The flags are flying, Jewish flags, Russian flags, our flags! Bravo, Jews! Bravo! Bravo!"

They were whispering at street-corners and in the pews of churches, the news was going round the shops and offices. In the tram-cars, where Poles sat behind and Germans in front, the Poles talked behind their hands. The Germans knew what they were talking about, and sat up harsh and upright. The German officers striding along the pavements of the Ujadowska glared harshly through their eye-glasses. They swept the pedestrians into the roadway like a cutter hurling chaff aside.

"*Die gottverdammten Juden!*" they said behind their teeth. "By God, we'll show them this time!" It was those flags that most exacerbad them. The unspeakable insolence!

In the Ghetto those who had not permitted themselves to believe it before, believed it now, within a few moments of the firing of the first shots: "This time it is war to the end. If any of us are left alive, they will not permit us to go on living, as they did in January, to work the Ghetto industries. There'll be no factories left, in any case. We'll see to that. Who's the section-leader of this block? We want to fight, too. There won't be rifles and guns enough to go round. Well, a heap of rags soaked in petrol to set fire to a stack of uniforms is also a weapon. Bandages and scissors and disinfectants and swabs are also weapons. Give us weapons, section-leaders. We want to fight, too."



There were also some who prayed. For throughout their long history many Jews have thought of prayer as one of the most potent of all weapons. So certain old men and women, who were quite incapable of firing a weapon, or carrying in a wounded fighter after a sally into the open, sat down on low stools and prayed and sang psalms. Now and again they might suspend the praying to tend to the soup or even to bake a loaf. But food was in small supply, and when that gave out, they just sat there, swaying from side to side, and prayed. Sometimes they went on praying, though the enemy had crashed through into the house they prayed in, and the enemy picked them off one by one, fearing to go nearer, lest they were some sort of animated booby-trap. Sometimes the prayer was still on their lips, though the flames were on all sides, and pressing closer and closer to them.

It was not that they might escape from these perils that the Jews prayed and sang psalms; for they knew from the beginning that that was hopeless. Some prayed because their fathers had done so for countless generations; it was the Jewish habit. Others prayed with an exultation in their eyes that had not been there before. For the Lord had redeemed them from shame and cowardice. They would be dying a hard death, but a glorious one, worthy of the heroes that had died before in many times and lands.

Down in a deep and long cellar, which ended in a sort of apse, sat the Great Miraculous One, the Wonder-Rabbi of Semienka. He sat on a low stool and before him was a table knocked together out of boxes, and covered over with a spotless white cloth. Brass candlesticks stood at each end of the table, and between them were two or three large folio volumes, dog-eared, centuries old. In a cupboard against the wall was a parchment scroll of the *Sefer Torah*, the Book of the Law; there was a faded length of plush, embroidered with gold thread, against the cupboard, the Holy Ark. On either side of the Wonder-Rabbi sat two or three old men on empty ammunition-boxes, shaking from side to side, murmuring into their beards their psalms or the sacred sentences. The Wonder-Rabbi sat silent, sometimes for hours at a stretch, his head upon his chest, the long white beard flowing like refined silver. Then he would raise his head, and smile and talk, quite easily and normally. Then he would repair to the holy books before him, and examine the crabbed print minutely, as if there were certain secrets there, between one letter and the next, which still eluded him after these many years of study.

On a stool at the end of the passage, which you must pass if you sought audience with the Wonder-Rabbi, sat his first disciple, the *Bocher*, Reb Yizchok Perlmutter. He was not so difficult as he had been earlier. You did not need to come sueing with gifts. He smiled sweetly at you, and let you go through.



In that long passage there, pious Jews gathered regularly during the first days at the battle, to form a *minyon* for the three services. The heart felt lighter after the saying of prayer, shoulder to shoulder with other Jews; perhaps even more, if you had long been out of the habit of it. And the close-by sanctity of the Wonder-Rabbi was like a playing of soft breezes at dawn, down there in that dark night, in the entrails of the doomed city. After the first days the services were less regular. Then they ceased.

## IV

"The goddam Jews!" muttered Hinze. "I'll have to ask Schiller for his goddam tanks! And those goddam flags," he added, "I'll have them down if I have to climb up the drainpipes and tear them down with my own fingers!"

He did not actually do that, of course. He found it extraordinarily hard to eliminate those flags throughout the whole duration of the battle. In the first place, they were high in the top storeys of the buildings, and they called for good sniping. Sometimes they were out of the direct line of fire, and you either had to storm the whole building and take the flag by the rear, or simply set fire to the building. Since that was the programme anyway, that was what usually happened.

But it was not really a very effective measure. For as soon as one flag was liquidated, another took its place, sometimes in places apparently so inaccessible that you began to wonder if it wasn't creatures with wings who were fixing them there. More than once during the weeks that followed, the Germans began to allow themselves to believe that the defenders were at last either all dead, or crouched in sewers, only awaiting the opportunity to emerge and crave the victors' clemency, when a sudden fresh splutter of bullets, a sudden fresh flutter of flags, made it clear the Jews were not done for yet.

From a military point of view, however, it was more urgent to get the tanks in than to get the flags out.

Hinze got through to Schiller, who had the tanks. Schiller had been waiting for him.

"How many do you need, Gruppenführer?"

"Four will do the trick. After all, they've only got popguns. That'll blast the hell out of them!"

The second stage of the battle began at three o'clock that same afternoon, entry being affected at the same gates as before. The infantry with rifles and tommy-guns went ahead to pour a hail of lead into any strongpoints



which had not been mopped up earlier. They were supported by flame-throwers. Then the tanks followed. By this time barricades had been thrown up, overturned tramcars, piled-up paving-stones, blocks of concrete. The tanks thrust through them like an animal thrusting through undergrowth. No effort was made to fire at them, partly because they were big tanks, Panthers, invulnerable to anything the defenders had; and partly because the defenders wanted to produce the impression that the tanks, which they certainly had been expecting, had frightened the living guts out of them. The Panthers had gone quite a number of blocks into the Ghetto, when, with about the same suddenness as before, from roof-tops, from behind chimneys, from behind lumps of wall, from numerous points of vantage which had not been used earlier, a concerted fusillade descended on the supporting infantry.

But there were flame-throwers now, as well as light and heavy machine-guns, the guns of the armoured cars, the big guns of the tanks. Death roared and whistled through the air. Death spat back again. The tanks did tremendous damage where they stood. But that was the trouble. They did not dare to be mobile without their screens of protecting infantry, forward and rear, and the infantry was dreadfully vulnerable until it dived into doorways and passages, which were all far more familiar to the defenders than to them. Further, there had been Molotov Cocktails whizzing down towards the tanks to set them on fire, and hand-grenades to put out the tracks. They had not found their mark, but were to be avoided. The tanks killed a great number of Jews, reduced a number of buildings to rubble, but they could not root out rats, they could not descend stairs, crawl along sewers. They were deadly, but, like some vast toothed and tusked prehistoric monster, they were also, in these narrow streets, slightly ridiculous.

It was the men on foot that had the dirty work to do, and they went to it, with bullets where possible, with cold steel where necessary. But the others had bullets, too, and cold steel. The Germans were ready to die, like German soldiers, but preferred to live if it could be managed. The Jews knew there was nothing to do but die, but they were determined that their death would be costly. They had been vilified by these people now for an infinite decade, they had been scourged, they had been robbed of all that makes life livable, except certain emotions. They had a score to pay back, and now they had taken, and been given, the chance to pay it. If an arm broken into fragments was still miraculously capable of holding a gun at the shoulder or pull a trigger, the miracle was achieved. If a German flame-thrower penetrated a cellar and reduced five fighters to lumps of sizzling flesh, and there was a sixth, still blazing like a torch, capable by unthinkable effort of turning the nozzle back into the face of the man who held it—the thing was done. Yes, the Germans killed far more Jews than the Jews



Germans; but it was the shells that did most of their killing for them. All other killing was extravagantly costly.

The fires that the Jews themselves and the Germans had raised were burning fiercely in various sections of the Ghetto, and chiefly along the line of the two attacks from the Nalewki and Stawki gates. The smoke-plumes gushed and fanned out into the upper air, then came drifting down into the town on the north wind. The smoke grew less visible and the flames more lurid as dusk descended. To Hinze, back at the assembly-point outside Nalewki, the portable radios of his platoon N.C.O.s conveyed no comfort. The men were fighting well, and dying where need was, but were getting no further. It was clear that probably over many months the Jew-swine had dug a whole system of underground communications, where it was immediate death to penetrate, should anyone stumble on their entrances.

"There's only one way," Hinze dourly told himself, "of doing this job. We must advance step by step, demolishing each strongpoint as we meet it, disinfecting with flame each cellar as we expose it. I've withdrawn my men once. I can't withdraw a second time. What sort of a fool will they think me? The men are doing all right. They're killing Jews. They're finding out where the stink-holes are, at the back of all that smoke and flame. But if I lose any of those tanks, Schiller'll have the flesh off my bones.

"Get those tanks back to the assembly-points!" he ordered.

It was against the background of the withdrawal of the tanks to Nalewki that the figure of Tania Polednikova first definitely emerges from the smoke and tumult and flame of the Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto.

The defenders did not, of course, know her by that name. They knew her as "Raven", her name as a guerilla fighter and as an emissary from Moscow. She seems, even so soon as that first attack, between eleven and eleven-forty-five in the morning, to have become manifest, a creature more daring, more resourceful, perhaps even more joyous, than most others, and, perhaps as a consequence of those qualities, quite fantastically immune from the perils that whined and hurtled through the air.

A number of observers outside the Ghetto walls record the prowess of a girl on a balcony on Muranowska, firing a machine-gun whenever the attackers presented a target. Her appearance corresponds exactly with that of the Tania whose arrival in the Ghetto has been described here. She was of medium height, slim and bony, with her dun hair drawn back on either side of a central parting, and with a rather thin plume-like nose slightly tip-tilted. When observed on the Muranowska balcony, and later during the episode on Nalewki, and in fact whenever she appears in the accounts of the developing battle, she wears a red kerchief knotted in front of her neck and falling unevenly between her shoulder-blades. It is not known



whether she wore the red kerchief merely because she happened to pick it up, or as a political affirmation, so to speak, a slogan. Perhaps she wore it, or went on wearing it, because it was bright and gay and defiant.

This is not at all inconsonant with the legend of Raven, as it has been subsequently told, a legend being taken to mean exactly that, a thing told, not a thing feigned. It may seem inconsonant with the character of Tania as evolved in these pages, in which there was a definite element of the young schoolmarm. But she was, after all, young. There was fantasy in her blood. The unequal and unprecedented battle may have released in her emotions which she herself certainly did not suspect. It seems she did not pause to eat, if there was anything to eat, or to sleep, when there was a lull of which she might have taken advantage. Like Shelley's poets, she fed on light and air—though the light was shot with flame and the air was foul with damp and sewer-smells. She had asked herself idly what the effect of hunger would be on them all, a depressant, like bromide, or a stimulant, like vodka. She knew now. She would roar with laughter, the observers noted, as she swung round the barrel of her machine-gun on the balcony in Muranowska, all the more when a yell indicated that a bullet had found its mark. She seems to have knelt there for a full half-hour, the gun being fed by another woman prone on the balcony behind her. She knelt there, made the more palpable a target by her red kerchief, as if she believed they could not possibly hit her, however well they aimed. Or perhaps she merely did not care. She was having a glorious time, and if there was a price to pay, she would pay it.

After that first half-hour, a note was handed over to her from within the room. She shrugged her shoulders, handed her gun over to her partner, and disappeared. The woman took her place, and within a minute a bullet found her between the temples. All that day and the next day her body was seen lying huddled on the balcony. It only passed from view when the building was set on fire, and at length the whole fabric crashed to the ground.

The stories of what Tania was up to during the rest of that first day are not circumstantial, until the episode occurs in the late dusk during the withdrawal of the tanks towards Nalewki. There had been two tanks operating in that area, the other two having been over towards Stawki. The order went out—back to the assembly-point. Without displeasure the tanks obeyed, turning round their huge snouts and lumbering off, creaking, grinding, firing as they went.

A Panzer Scharführer, or Sergeant, was in the tank ahead, a young officer in the rear tank. They had doubtless been given to understand that the final reach of Nalewki was entirely in German hands, the houses on either side of the street were either flattened or blazing to high heaven, with every Jew rebel in the area extirpated.

It must have been hot inside that rear tank, as it is always hot in every



tank. It is certain the officer lacked experience, and even sense. He had reached safety, why not lift the turret-lid and come up for a breath of air and an enjoyable glimpse of the subjugated territory? He lifted the lid, and, supporting one foot on a rung of the exit-ladder, another on the edge of the driver's seat, thrust his head and shoulders through the opening.

In that same instant, with the speed and accuracy of a lizard, a girl with a red kerchief detached herself from behind a heap of rubble, hurled herself on to the rear of the tank, and, seizing the hand-holds with almost a monkey's agility, stood for one brief instant on the roof of the tank behind the young officer's head and shoulders. In that brief instant several things happened. With her pistol she shot the officer through the back of the head. The young man slid through into the belly of the tank. The young woman unhooked a hand-grenade from her belt, released the pin, and hurled it after the young man. There was a dull thud within, the tank lurched over on to the right-hand side and crashed up the pavement into the building beyond. The young woman was away, she had gone down into a hole, disappeared into a passage, gone up like a puff of smoke. She was not there.

That seems to have been Tania's special talent, and it amounted to genius—her faculty for being at the right split second in a place where there was need of her, or where she could achieve against immense odds one of those impertinent coups she delighted in. She was not an organizer, as she now and again foolishly imagined, and there seem to have been one or two serious brushes with Artur, the Polish lieutenant, who represented the Polish Underground and was responsible for the control of the resources in men and material it had supplied. He was, after all, an aristocrat, and profoundly religious; he was pretty well everything she disliked most. It is unthinkable that, as a result of these tiffs, the one or the other of them might have said: "All right, then. I'm not playing. I'm going home." But there might have been serious embarrassment, for the young man had an important following, and the young woman quickly acquired one, if Klepfisz, the Boy, had not stepped in. The Boy's delicacy and sweetness were quite irresistible. The Polish officer bowed charmingly, as if Tania were a grande dame in a Radziwill salon—there in that stinking cellar; Tania raised her arm in a clenched-fist salute as if Artur were a Stakhanovite hero. And the difficulty was smoothed over. Artur conferred with his band of young Polish aides and indicated by what still unwatched man-holes a fresh supply of machine-gun ammunition might be smuggled in. Tania slid away to that still standing house which commanded the German machine-gun post that had just established itself, blissfully unaware that along one line of fire it was mortally vulnerable.

A number of tales concerning Tania's prowess circulated in the Ghetto



during the actual battle, and were spread abroad in widening circles when it was ended. There was the episode of the tank, which has just been narrated. There was another tale of a tank, which careered about for a full five minutes sporting a red flag in its rear. If Tania was responsible for that caper, she seems to have developed a sense of humour in Warsaw which had been rudimentary in Moscow and Kiev. There was an episode on the third day when one of Klempert's armoured lorries was careering up Karmelicka from S.S. headquarters in Leszno. Once again Tania emerged from nowhere, flung a grenade through the wind-screen into the driver's cab, instantaneously dispatching the driver and his mate. She disappeared, the lorry blundered sideways into an obstruction, and overturned. A moment later the flung bodies of the passengers were writhing on the pavements, soaked in blazing petrol.

While the Germans offered her any target at all, from tank to man, she was always one too many for them. They associated the red flash of her kerchief with a scream of laughter, which hung about in the air like a puff of smoke after she herself was gone. She did not merely tie a red rag round her throat. Wherever she found a piece of red cloth she tacked it on to the end of a stick and pushed it up through a chimney, out through a top-storey window, or wherever it might be. The red flag was found fluttering defiantly in the most frightening places, the roofs of gutted buildings, the pinnacles of lofty isolated walls, that seemed as if they must cave in if a cat should spring upon a window-sill.

The Raven's been flying again, said the Germans, as well as the Jews. They became as much aware of her as the defenders themselves. She's a witch, the Germans told themselves dourly, one of those Jew-witches the *Stürmer* writes about. She's got an amulet round her neck, made from the square of skin above a Christian child's heart. Bullets slide off her. If you have time, Hans, skip out of the way when you see that red kerchief flicker.

There was only one creature who defeated her during the progress of the Battle. It was a creature of whom some of the Jews said that he had supernatural powers, as many of the Germans said of her. But apparently his powers were more potent than hers. This creature was the Wonder-Rabbi of Semienka.

She must certainly have heard of the old man; for she was everywhere. Nobody was immune from her questioning in the period she spent underground before the battle started; and now and again, when there was a lull in the fighting, and she considered she had all the equipment to hand she might find necessary in the next stage, she discharged a volley of questions at anybody within range, and sometimes even listened to their answers. Perhaps she was a born question-asker and her upbringing in Russian schools had stifled the question-asking impulse. Perhaps it was the academic in



her; she felt impelled to acquire all the data available on the development of this particular episode in the Great Class War, in case she might survive it and get back to her seniors some day, when they would expect a thesis, a monograph, on the subject.

She went everywhere, she tackled everybody. But she did not go to the Wonder-Rabbi in his underground Yeshiveh, where he sat between the shining candlesticks, reading the old books and meditating the immortal mysteries. She was not interested in this decrepit Pappas, this repository of exploded superstitions, this large-scale purveyor of moral opium.

She did not go for at least several days, if only because there were many other things to do, and important ones. But on the fourth or fifth day she went. Curiosity may at last have overcome her profound objections. Or, perhaps, quite simply, he called her, and she went because she had to. She made her way along an interlinked line of cellars which she had not penetrated before, because she knew very well what was at the end of them. She saw the light of the candles gleaming from far off. She stepped across the threshold of the vaulted cellar, unaware, as it seemed, of the first *Bocher* and the other Jews there, assembled for the evening service. She stood there with her head erect, facing the old priest. The red kerchief was dark-red, like blood, in that dim light. For some time the Wonder-Rabbi did not suspend his meditation. He sat there, murmuring inaudibly into the long silver beard. She made a quick movement as if she had had enough; she had seen all she had come to see. She had all the data necessary for the projected footnote.

But the quick movement was checked, frozen, as it were. She stayed there rigid, staring before her, her hands stretched straight along her sides. So some half-minute or more passed. No one in the company uttered a word. At length the Wonder-Rabbi raised his head; and looked into her face. His blue eyes were fresh and pleasant; there was a winning smile upon his face. He seemed to be aware from *aleph* to *toph* of everything she was, and everything she had done.

"*Shalom, madele,*" he said to her, combining the Hebrew with the Yiddish tongue. "Peace, little girl!" He said no more with his lips, but he still, for a minute or two, seemed to be talking to her. Then at length the eyes clouded over, he uttered a faint sigh, and the head sank on to the chest again, the eyes closed.

She stood there uncertainly for some moments, then she turned and went back the way she had come. Her head was not at all as jaunty as it was on every other occasion when people had observed her. Her hands and feet seemed too big for her. She shuffled along, like a schoolgirl who has had an interview with a headmistress, who has been kind to her, but has thought it advisable to take the child down a peg or two.



It is clear Tania had found the Germans less chastening than the Wonder-Rabbi of Semienka.

## V

There were a number of people outside the Ghetto Wall who were witnesses of Tania's astonishing performance with her machine-gun on the Muranowska balcony. Among these was Oskar von Straupitz-Kalmin, who was now a man of leisure. There was no Food Control in the Warsaw Ghetto to administer, at least for the time being. He had slept late on the morning of the twentieth, the day the battle began, for the day before had been a most gruelling one. It so happened that he awoke, not in his own apartment on the Ujasdowska, but in the apartment of a Polish woman friend on the Zoliborska, north of the Ghetto Wall. He did not go to bed with this lady any more, but she was a comfortable creature, and soothed him when he felt unhappy.

He was still not quite awake at eleven o'clock when the sirens started shrieking and the firing began. His heart dropped like a stone.

"Elsie!" he cried out mournfully. "Oh Elsie, my poor, poor dear!"

He went over in his pyjamas and dressing-gown to the window, drew back the blinds, and looked down into the Ghetto. He was looking for Elsie, and was very certain he would not see her. He did not know whether she was alive or dead. All he knew was he had hoped to find her still in the Wolff apartment, and she had not been there. Had she, for some reason, gone out into the streets alone? In that case, it was quite possible that something had happened to her during the "softening-up" that had been going on that evening. Had Wolff taken her along with his wife into the comparative safety of some cellar? How safe would that be, and for how long? Would Wolff make some effort to get himself and his wife out of the Ghetto, and, in that case, would he consider himself bound by some sort of scruple to bring Elsie out with them?

He had a feeling that there was a great deal of integrity in Wolff, despite the racketeering they had indulged in together. If Wolff left the Ghetto, Oskar felt he would take Elsie with him. But his instinct was that Wolff would not leave. By all the signs, this might well be the day the Jews had been preparing for, the day of the resistance. Others might try and get away; not Wolff, he thought.

Or might Wolff take the two women to safety, himself remaining behind?

"Oh, don't be a fool, Oskar!" he implored of himself. "Don't let your heart follow such wild will-o'-the-wisps!"

He looked down into the Ghetto, but did not see Elsie. He saw the



advance crew of motor-bicycles go hurtling up Nalewki, and the armoured cars thrusting after them.

He saw the flags of Poland and Russia and Zion suddenly bloom upon the drab walls like folded poppies thrust wide open by a sharp slap of wind. Then he became aware of a thrust of bright colour which was not a flag, it was a garment. It was a red kerchief tied round the throat of a young woman on a balcony at the corner of Muranowska. She was crouched over her machine-gun. Crack-crack-crack-crack! went the bullets, as she pressed the button. One man, two men, three men down—squirming in the roadway, hand to head or heart, the machines kicking and wheezing.

Oskar witnessed the whole of that episode, the way in which the young woman was finally called away, the way in which the woman who took the gun from her was killed almost immediately. He did not know, nor in an infinitesimal degree suspect, that the young woman was the daughter of the sister of the woman he was grieving for. How should he? And, in fact, does not such a thing happen now and again to many of us, that we see, or rub shoulders with, or even talk to, people who might be of the most profound interest to us, if we knew that they have shared with us an experience which has meant much to us, or that they are connected in one way or another with a person or persons who have played an important part in our lives? Sometimes it is we ourselves who, later, establish the connection; sometimes others establish it for us. Most often it is never established at all. If the connection were established much more frequently, the world would be an even more disconcerting place than it now is.

And so it was that morning with Oskar von Straupitz-Kalmin. That was the daughter of Elsie's sister, Susan, he beheld. She was also the daughter of the man Polednik, the one-time Soviet Kommisar, of whom this narrative has spoken earlier, a man whom Oskar had met on his escape from internment in the Urals during the last war, and for whom he had developed a hatred more profound than any other passion in his life, certainly not excluding his love for Elsie Silver.

But to Oskar, gazing on that red-kerchiefed young woman, she was not Elsie's niece, Polednik's daughter. She was a devilish young Jew-woman with precious little flesh on her bones, doing deadly damage with a machine-gun, apparently miraculously immune from the would-be avenging bullets of her adversaries.

"What a wench!" said Oskar to himself, shaking his head, for he was sad at heart. "What a wench! Fancy the Jews turning out so tough a baby! Ah well! Elsie was a tough one, too! My poor, poor Elsie; my dear, dear Elsie!" He was already making a corpse of her. "My clever, clever Oskar! My wise, wise Oskar!" He banged his fist on the wall beside him with anger and misery.



"Oskar, my friend! Your coffee!" cried the lady in the room behind the window. "You'll have lots of time to look at the battle down there! It's going to last for days and days!"

"Oh, don't be absurd, Helena!" he said crossly. "Talk sense!"

Oskar was well aware of the existence of Herr Glaeser, the Gestapo agent, though he had not the privilege of his acquaintance. Indeed, he was such a singular little man that it was impossible to live in the same city with him, both members of the same foreign community, and not be aware of him. You could not fail sooner or later to notice the small fat rosy little man, with those bright little eyes twinkling behind pince-nez, the almost translucent moustaches, the chins in front and behind. There seem to be two sorts of agents in secret organizations: first, the agent who is invisible whenever he chooses to be; he is not frightening, for he is not seen until it is a matter of no importance whether his quarry is frightened or not. Then there is the agent whose duty it is to be visible to the quarry now and again, in brief disturbing glimpses. He is more than disturbing, he is demoralizing.

Glaeser was the second sort of agent. Whether Oskar was or was not his quarry, he certainly caught sight of Glaeser several times during the next four days, washing his hands in a cloakroom, buying a newspaper at the next corner.

"I suppose he'll be paying me a visit quite soon," Oskar told himself. "Well, there's nothing I can do to discourage him. If he comes, he comes."

On the evening of the fourth day he came. He was brisk and friendly, and rather apologetic.

"I do hope you'll forgive me, Herr Straupitz-Kalmin, but they've asked me to pay you a visit, so here I am. You don't mind, do you?" He rubbed the rosy little hands together.

"Why should I mind?" asked Oskar. "Sit down. Have a drink. There's a nice little Moselwein on tap."

"Oh, thank you, thank you. That's most kind of you. You know what I've come about, of course?"

"I have an idea. You're wondering if I have any information to give you regarding the present whereabouts of General von Brockenburg's widow?"

"Quite right, Herr Straupitz-Kalmin. The Jews got him at last." He sighed. "How awfully nice of you to come straight to the point like this. It makes things easier all round. Have you any information about the lady?"

Oskar held out his cigarette-case and took one himself.

"Have one?" he asked. He tapped his own cigarette down on the table.

"Thanks. Yes?" Glaeser's little eyes beamed brightly behind the pince-nez.



"Not the faintest idea, dear Herr Glaeser. I wish I had. As you probably know, she was very much a girl friend of mine once."

"Of course. We know that. That's why I'm here today. We feel that if anyone knows where she is at this moment, it's you. Let me come straight to the point. We're aware you smuggled her into the Ghetto, of course. We know exactly where you took her."

"Really?" Oskar raised his eyes. It was quite impossible to tell whether the little man was bluffing or not. And really he did not see that it mattered very much. "But, my dear Herr Glaeser," he observed, "if you've been so sure as all that, why on earth haven't you come to me before? Of course this business"—he pointed northward, towards the sound of the guns in the Ghetto—"must be imposing a great strain on all you fellows."

"We shall manage," said the other primly. "We shall manage. Oh no. As I told you, I'm going to be completely frank with you. We know exactly where you took her. You led us there yourself, of course."

"Of course."

"But that's where we lose sight of her. The point is . . . the point is, where did you take her from there, Herr Straupitz-Kalmin? Where is she hiding at this moment?"

"As I told you before, Herr Glaeser, I really haven't the faintest idea in the world. She may be dead for all I know."

Herr Glaeser looked quite downcast.

"I had hoped you'd be more co-operative," he complained. He pursed the rosy little mouth. "We've allowed these four days to pass by in the hope you'd take us to her new hide-out. As you took us to her hide-out in the Ghetto. That was a bit of a mistake, you know. If you'll forgive me for saying so, you should have controlled yourself."

The only thing to do with the little squirt was to pick him up by the scruff of the neck and drop him through the window. But that would be a bit of a mistake, too. He bowed frigidly.

"We'd awfully like to be taken to her." There was almost a note of pleading in Glaeser's voice. "It would save . . . so much trouble. It isn't known whether his Excellency will be coming to Warsaw after all. But, whether in Warsaw or Berlin, he'd awfully like to renew his acquaintance with her."

"Yes," said Oskar. His blood was quite cold. It was as if a graveyard worm were crawling along his spine.

"So, if you could be of any help to us . . ." murmured Herr Glaeser. He thrust out both his hands to show how ample their gratitude would be.

"I have no information to give you," said Oskar sombrely, "on my word of honour."



"Tut, tut!" said Herr Glaeser, rising from his chair, the eyes twinkling merrily. "Am I to take it that that is your last word?"

Oskar rose. He was a good deal taller than Glaeser. He looked down on him and examined him, as if he were a citizen of a country he had very little knowledge of.

"This is the measure of our degradation," he said to himself, a little self-righteously, for he, too, had been involved in the degradation. "It's not long ago that there wasn't a German throughout the whole length and breadth of Germany who would have dared to question the word of a Prussian officer. I could crush this thing between my hands, but it would be like crushing a large black beetle."

"Good day, Herr Glaeser," he said.

Herr Glaeser raised his arm, all very formal and proper, in the Hitler salute.

"Heil Hitler!" he said, and left.

Next day the Gestapo agents called for Oskar and requested him to accompany them to Gestapo Headquarters. The obligatory black Mercedes was drawn up beside the pavement. He was again cross-examined, not so suavely and friendlily as before. In a way this second cross-examination was less intolerable. He had no more information to give them than he had given Glaeser the day before. He was then taken off to the room devoted to the more stringent method of cross-examination that was now employed. It was an indignity recognized and deplored by all the people involved, if only because most of Oskar's predecessors in that chamber had been mere Poles or Jews or Russians. But none of the severities were for that reason remitted. The performance was repeated the next day, and the day after; but no additional information was extracted from Oskar, for there was none to extract.

"That's what you get for whoring with a Jew-bitch!" they told him. "You've had it coming to you!"

It seemed to him, when they finally flung him aside, that there was little to choose between these people, Germans though they were, and those Bolshevik Russians whom he had once so insensately hated.

His thoughts turned to Elsie again, from whom they had never strayed far during these proceedings.

"Well, good-bye, my little Elsie," he said to himself. "I wonder if you had any idea all this was going on? Where were you, I wonder? Where are you now? Well, my dear, it's all over now. The pale-green Rolls-Royce in the Tiergartenstrasse, do you remember? You once said it was so long you were half-way there before you set out! The Kabarett der Komiker—oh, what a little Jew-witch you were, what you didn't *do* to those boys!



The pale-pink mountains of *Eisbein* at the Hamburger Klause—remember?—like a gorgeous raspberry *soufflé*. The comic ducks in the Tiergarten, the huge white chrysanthemums in your crystal vases, the little gold leaves in the Dantziger Goldwasser that were so pretty. All gone. All gone.

"It's all over now. We shan't meet in Stockholm, or Buenos Ayres, or wherever it might be, spending poor old Willi Brockenburg's money like water. I hadn't done so badly myself, you know. There'd not be much point in meeting again, I think. I wouldn't be much use to you, Elsie my dear.

"Ah well, good-bye, Elsie. Good-bye. Good-bye."

## VI

"You crazy lunatic!" cried the young woman in Russian. There was a young man with her. They seized Elsie Silver bodily, and swept her off the ground down a dark and narrow passage, as players seize a ball in a ball game, and are off with it before the opposing players are aware of their onslaught.

"Down here—quick!" said the young man. He spoke in Polish. They were both excited, so they used the speech that came spontaneously to their lips. They had been speaking Yiddish to each other until now.

On the left was a doorway ajar, perhaps for exactly such an emergency as this. It was a side door into a workmen's block of flats. They thrust through the doorway, swept along a passage to their right, down some basement steps, into the basement—across a black threshold into a cellar. They were careful to bang each door to as they went beyond it. The elder woman was as limp now as a sack of coal. It was exactly as if she were a sack of coal that the young man was carrying her. He did not look at all strong, but he was stronger than he looked. He wore no cap, he had rather fine wavy hair that the candlelight in the cellar refined still further. He was wearing an open Byron shirt with attached collar.

The young man took out his torch.

"They'll be yelling blue murder," he said. "I think I hear them breaking a door open. There's a coal-chute behind these boxes, then the way in. Take her through, and I'll build up the boxes." He was talking Yiddish now.

"Very well, Boy," the girl said. "I'll take her." The two were talking Yiddish again. "I don't think they'll want to penetrate far." She handled the pistol at her hip affectionately.

They got their burden into the coal-chute and through the low entrance hacked out of the wall. They were in the cellar of another house now.



Here they paused and drew breath. The cellar was linked to another cellar in the complex subterranean chain. The Germans were most unlikely to follow as far as this, and would be ill-advised if they did.

The Boy lowered Elsie Silver from his shoulders and leaned her against the wall. She was still completely out.

"The idiot!" said Tania. "She ought to be soundly smacked. Do you know her?"

"I don't," said the Boy. "She's got a rather beautiful face! We'll have to take her along and leave her with somebody. Let me work out exactly where we are now." He closed his eyes the better to present to his imagination the map of the underground communications. "All right," he said. "We can take her to Post Sixteen at Kupiecka. The Kaplan girls will look after her."

They were there some minutes later. This cellar was large; it had been some sort of underground storehouse. There was a group of people down here, who seemed to have quite a lot of work on their hands. The place was evidently to serve as a casualty clearing station. Two young women were busy rolling bandages; a spectacled young man, possibly a medical student, was sterilizing instruments in a basin of boiling water. One or two others were checking up on phials and larger bottles. The place was lit by candle-light, but there were a couple of unlit acetylene lamps on a bench, probably ready for surgical work, as soon as it became necessary. There were a few mattresses and rugs on the floor.

"Dora Kaplan," the Boy called out. "We're going to leave this woman here." He put her down on one of the mattresses. She showed signs of coming to.

"Who is she?" asked the young woman called Dora Kaplan.

"I don't know," the Boy said. "This one is Raven. She's a friend from Russia."

There were perfunctory greetings. The post, Tania thought, was probably a nest of Bundists.

"Yes," said Dora Kaplan, and Leah, her sister, nodding their heads. "She's been here."

"Yes," said Raven shortly. She was still at the point where she did anything but put people at their ease. That faculty was to come quite suddenly, like a light going on, with the firing of the first shot next day. "Oh, what's this doing here?" She had noticed a red rag, or it might have been a red kerchief, on the bench over against the acetylene lamps. "Is this anybody's?" Nobody claimed it. "All right." She tied it round her neck.

The woman on the mattress uttered a deep sigh. Her eyelids fluttered. The girl, Dora, had a phial of something at her nostrils. Elsie's eyes opened.

"Shall we be moving on?" asked Raven.



"Wait," said the Boy.

The eyes of the woman remained glassy for half a minute or so. Then awareness came into them. But it was less an awareness of the people and the place around her than of the thing she had witnessed some fifteen or twenty minutes ago. She turned on her side and shivered violently, covering her eyes with her hands.

The Boy knelt down beside her and placed his hand on her forehead; he seemed to have the healing touch.

"Listen, *Iddene*, Jewess," he said to her softly. "You must pull yourself together. You won't do anyone any good lying there and shivering. You must forget them for the time being. Do you hear? Then; when you're yourself again, you can tell us what help you can be. We're going to get our own back, Jewess."

"Anybody'd think she'd never seen Nazis carrying on before," said Tania contemptuously.

Elsie turned to the sound of the voice, as if it were something familiar, she had heard it somewhere else, a long time ago. She looked up to the spare bony figure of the young woman in the black dress and the red kerchief, with the rather plume-like slightly tip-tilted nose. The other looked back without interest.

"I'm sorry," murmured Elsie, "that I was such a baby." She shook her head hard as if she were trying to expel, at least for the time being, until she was better equipped to cope with it, the image of the horror she had just witnessed. "I'll be all right soon." She addressed herself to the young man with the open shirt. He seemed a much more sympathetic creature than the young woman in the red kerchief. "Please don't bother about me. I'll be all right soon."

"You're German?" asked the Boy. She had been answering German to his Yiddish. She nodded. "What's your name?"

There was a silence.

"What's my name?" she asked herself. "Here it goes again. My name. My name. Elsie von Brockenburg's my name. Heaven forbid. Elsie Silver's my name. Is it? Is it? Never, never, never again."

She said those words aloud, not realizing she uttered them.

"Never, never, never again," she said.

"What's that?" asked the Boy. He heard the words quite clearly. So had the others. They looked down curiously at Elsie where she lay.

"I don't know my name," whimpered Elsie, and turned her head and thrust it into the mattress.

The Boy was kneeling by her side again.

"That's all right," he murmured. "Lots of people here don't know their names. It's quite common." He addressed the others: "Her name's



Channah," he said. Then he repeated the name to Elsie. "Your name's Channah, see?" He rose. "God should look after you. And you, too, of course." He smiled at the two Kaplan girls. They smiled back at him. If the Boy wanted them to look after this sad woman in the little fur coat, which looked as if it once had been a very good little fur coat, they would look after her. There was nothing in the world one would not do for the Boy.

"We'll go now, Raven," said the Boy.

"Yes," said Tania shortly. It seemed to her that altogether too much fuss had been made over the silly woman. "Let's move!"

Dora and Leah Kaplan were quite used to seeing people dying in the streets, and it was only because they were just a little hardier than others that they had not died themselves. They would not have worried overmuch over the woman that had been dumped on them if the Boy hadn't asked them to. But he had; so they heated up for her some sort of bouillon they had ready prepared.

"How are you feeling now, Channah?" Leah asked. "I'm busy. Can I do anything more for you?"

"Thank you. That's fine," Elsie murmured. "Please don't let me get in your way. I'll be all right in a minute or two. I'm all right now."

"Very well. Is there anything you'd like to do?" asked Leah. She was a very matter-of-fact young woman. "We can use every pair of hands we can get hold of."

"Certainly," said Elsie, and rose to her feet. She was still feeling extremely feeble, and would have fallen if Dora had not put out a hand to hold her up.

"The poor thing," Dora murmured. She was clearly the kind-hearted one of those two sisters. "I wonder when she last had a crust of bread?"

A sudden picture flashed upon the screen of Elsie's mind: a beautiful casket of chocolates, embossed *Schrafft, New York*; a woman very elegantly turned out sitting in the corner of a train, lifting the succulent chocolates to her mouth at careful intervals, in case she should go fat.

*Crump! Crump!*

The explosion was not a bomb from a British aeroplane raiding Munich. It was up there, on one of the Warsaw Ghetto streets close at hand.

"No, I'm all right, Fräulein Kaplan," Elsie said. "I had a nice stew not long ago." She was getting steadier on her feet, and could stand up without supporting herself against the wall. "What is there to do?"

"You can roll bandages for the present," said Leah Kaplan.

"Yes, of course," said Elsie. She had always imagined that all bandages were ready rolled, in neat little blue cylinders. That obviously was not so.

"There," said Leah Kaplan, pointing over her shoulder. The information



was not necessary. You could see where the two helpers sat before a basket, rolling away. Elsie took her place beside the others. There was no need for her to say a word to them, or for them to say a word to her. She belonged there. She got to work. She hoped she would be able to do the sterner jobs when the time came to do them.

It cannot be said that Elsie Silver was of much use to the workers at Post Sixteen on Kupiecka that night, though she improved during the course of the next two or three days; and she quite held her own after that, when the building was crashing down in flames above their heads, and it was necessary to move the Post with great speed to a cellar under Pawia, both the wounded and such material as could be carted off. She had once been a conspicuously lazy woman—except for occasional and almost frightening spurts of activity. Down in the cellars she was as active as any woman of her age. This first night she had a tendency to go off into a sort of dazed dreaming; the fingers that were rolling the bandages slackened and lay still upon her lap; once or twice a tear came into her eye, and rolled slowly down her cheek; she seemed totally unaware of it.

"It's true! It's true! It's true! It's true!" The words kept on ticking like an old clock, a steady implacable clock, on a mantel-shelf. "Did I know the whole time? Oh, I beg you, on bended knee. I did not know the whole time. I suspected dreadful things, but I did not know. Perhaps they knew more in the world outside than many knew within the Reich borders. You suspected dreadful things? That's true. That's why I ran round and round and round, Berlin, Baden, Salzburg, Berlin, Baden, Salzburg, like a white mouse in a cage."

"Are you seeking to excuse yourself?"

"I'm not seeking to excuse myself. I'm only saying this is what happened."

"You had your chance, Elsie. You remember those notes in your hand-bag, from the people who wanted to contact you, way back in Berlin? You remember the telephone call you did not take, lying back in your bed there, snug and sweet in your satin pyjamas?"

"I had my chances, and I didn't take them. I was wicked. Perhaps it's not too late now."

The fingers were alive again, straightening out the washed, frayed bandage-material, tightening the small drum in the palm of her hand.

The accusing Elsie eased up a little. She seemed to have got as far as she intended, at least for the time being, with the horrified, crushed, repentant Elsie.

"Wicked," said the accusing Elsie in a more jocular tone. "That's not the half of it. You've been a bad girl."



"I know. I know. Don't rub it in."

"Between you and me, where does it go back to?"

"I wish I knew myself. Back to the day I first put on trousers and a top-hat and smacked my hip with a cane? Back to the night I first didn't come home to Oleander Street?"

"Perhaps the night you first saw Oskar? You remember? In the *Regenbogendiele* in Berlin."

"Oh Elsie, *please*. You know better than that. There never was a night when I first saw Oskar. I'd always seen Oskar, the eyes and the scar and the patches of burned skin."

"Always? Back into your mother's womb, then?"

"You're driving me pretty hard, aren't you? You're trying to blame all this on to Oskar. Is that fair?"

"Are you denying that if it hadn't been for Oskar you'd have left Germany long ago, say in nineteen hundred and thirty-three? You hadn't any real place there after that, had you?"

"You've got me there, Elsie. But I liked Germany and Germans. Oskar was not one of *these*."

"They've left their mark in him, wouldn't you say?"

"Where haven't they left their mark? Play fair. I wonder where he is now? I should imagine he's frightfully worried, shouldn't you?"

"Are you as much in love with him as you always have been?"

"That's an awfully silly question, if you don't mind me saying so. Who's the 'you' you're talking about? I've got a name on an identity card. For the life of me I can't think what it is. Lydia something-or-other. I think I came from Cassel. But I don't really. Ask the young man with the open shirt. I come from Oleander Street, and my name's Channah."

"What's that you say? Your name's Channah, and you come from Oleander Street? That's your mother's name, you know, not yours. That young man called you Channah here in the Warsaw Ghetto because he didn't know any better. I was there."

"I wish you wouldn't tie me up like this, Elsie. I don't know how it is, but they fade into each other, the Warsaw Ghetto and Oleander Street, they're one and the same place. My mother and me, too, we're one and the same person. And all five girls. It's been like that since I came up inside the Wall. I do wish you wouldn't bother me, Elsie. I want to get on with these bandages."

"It's all right by me, Channah. I think I'll be bothering you less and less. But I would like you to answer one question."

"Oh, you are a nuisance. Which one?"

"About Oskar."



"I'm *frightened* about Oskar. Leave me alone, Elsie, will you? Leave me alone!"

She reached into the basket for another strip of bandage.

Now and again that other Elsie came flickering into the cellar, or into the room behind the eyes: the Elsie of the English music-halls; Elsie, Lady Malswetting; Elsie Silver of the Berlin cabarets; husky-voiced Elsie; Elsie in immaculate male evening-dress.

"That'll shake you, that will," mocked the other Elsie.

That was the first case they brought down into the Post about half an hour after the Battle started. The man was in a bad way. Half his jaw had been shot off and blood was oozing thickly through shirt and cloak-sleeve below the shoulder.

"The morphia!" said the medical student, Monash. Elsie handed the morphia over. He administered it. "The scissors! Cut the sleeve open!"

She took the sleeve and exposed the arm completely. Her nose was within some inches of the torn flesh, the exposed bone, the pumping blood-vessels. The smell of blood and death came up warm and rank into her nostrils.

"The swabs!" said Monash.

She handed the swabs over, and stood by with the basin of disinfectant. If she had been shaken it had been imperceptibly.

The man died, but not in agony. She had been of some use in deadening and curtailing it. She believed that from now on she would not fail.

It was very noisy outside there, and, of course, it was frightening. She did not think it at all likely she was going to survive the Battle, which now, night and day, was raging so furiously. She did not see what point there would be in surviving it. Of course she would have liked to go back to Doomington again, and see her family, those who were still there. She would like to see the old man again, and her mother, if they had survived the air-raids. She had always avoided listening to the news, but the news that Doomington had had one or two severe poundings had come through to her somehow. If the old folk were still alive, were they still living in Oleander Street, or had the family forced them to migrate to a greener district? If she knew the old folk, they would dig tooth and nail into the little old house, and nothing short of a bomb would dislodge them. Perhaps a bomb had? She would like to have found that out before she died. How was dear little May? (That was the youngest of the five Silver daughters.) She would always go on thinking of May as "little" May, though she was probably a respectable matron by now.

"You were a pretty average swine to May, you know."



Aha! Here she was! The other Elsie! Pointing at this Elsie with that enormous amber cigarette-holder Oskar had once given her.

She didn't find it at all difficult to dismiss the other Elsie. This lad's wound would go gangrenous if they weren't careful. She got down to it.

Of course she would like to go back to the town she'd been born in, and the people she'd cared for, in her own rather too free-and-easy way. But what chance was there of that, if she survived? None at all. The Germans would either put you up then and there against a wall and shoot you, the moment you came out into the street; or they would take you over to the cemetery, make you dig your own grave, and shoot you then. Or, if they didn't do the one thing or the other, it would just be the train—and the Journey.

So if you said the Battle up there was frightening, you meant it was frightening to the senses, the noise of it, and the smell of gunpowder and smoke that somehow came seeping through, and the smells down here, the mould and the blood and the pus. But it wasn't frightening to the spirit. That couldn't be frightened now, she thought.

She certainly wasn't frightened when they made the quick move to the new Post under Pawia. And it had to be quick, too. They had had to move one of the small ammunition-dumps to a cellar passage not far off—there was nothing for it. And the Post might go up any moment. In fact, it did. That put paid to the account of one of the Kaplan girls and some others. They got the wounded away in time, however, and she, Elsie, was safe and sound, too. For the time being, at least. Safe, sound, and not even hungry. You soon get to the point when you can do without anything but a sup of water, and a couple of spoonfuls of soup seems like a big meal. It even spoils things, somehow; at a certain point hunger excites you, it goes to your head like a champagne cocktail.

The leaders had been clever about water. So had everybody else, for that matter. Every bath-tub and receptacle was full of water when the fighting started. Wells had been dug into courtyards or in the foundations of houses under the eyes of the house-porters. Quite likely a number of the porters had looked the other way during the digging.

Yes, water was all right down there, in the second location of the number Sixteen Post. As a matter of fact, it dropped from the ceilings and oozed up between the stone flags. But better too much water than too little.

Elsie did not have much to say to anybody down there, nor did anybody have much to say to her. Everybody was too busy to talk, except the wounded and the dying. As for them, so long as they have strength left to talk, they seem to want to get things off their chests.

As for the other Elsie, she made very few appearances down in the Pawia cellar, far fewer than in the place they had come from. Down there things became pretty well simplified, solid or liquid, fire or water. The other Elsie



crystallized very sharply into the sophisticated Elsie, the Elsie who had once married an English baronet in the south of France and a German general in Berlin. The Elsie of the cellar was much more Channah than Elsie; she was hardly Elsie at all; she was one of the five Silver daughters, whose parents were a little Jewish tailor and his wife.

It was odd how the phantasm of Oleander Street imposed itself upon the phantasm of the cellars of the Warsaw Ghetto, so that they merged like two exposures on one film. She recalled it had been like that the moment she came up from her ordeal in the sewer. But now it was like that continuously. There was no nonsense about the way she did the jobs assigned to her, cleaning and bandaging wounds, spreading ointments over burned flesh, and the rest. But the people around her, both those who were still sound and those who lay moaning and dying, perpetually assumed the lineaments of people she had known long, long ago in Doomington. But not the lay Doomington, so to speak, the Gentile Doomington, Oxford Street and Deansgate, and the Tivoli and the Palace Theatre. It was the smaller, more intimate Doomington she had been born to and would not die in, the Longton district of the city where east and west from the central thoroughfare of Blenheim Road ran the streets of the flowering shrubs, Oleander Street, Magnolia Street, Acacia Street, Lavender Street.

Believe it or not, the woman who had been brought in an hour ago with a bullet in her thigh—if she was not Mrs. Poyser, well, she was Mrs. Poyser's twin sister. And this Kaplan girl—the one that was still alive—she had reminded Elsie of someone from the moment her eyes had formed a clear image of her. Becky Poyser, of course! Sometimes those resemblances imposed themselves on her when she was thinking least along these lines. "Mr. Emmanuel!" she once said aloud, and the old man looked at her, startled, then made up his mind it was another old man she was addressing. At other times she played a sort of game, wilfully. How awfully like that Moishe Levi boy this boy is—a few years older, of course. He still forgets to wipe his nose. And here's Rachel, on my word, the one that made such a scandal by wearing the shameless low neck at Israel's wedding. The illusion was sometimes so sharp that she could smell the dinner they were baking in the Oleander Street kitchen; fried fish, and *lockshen* soup, and the chicken the soup had been made with, and the sweet carrot pudding. But she discouraged that, so far as she could. The return of the nose to the smells of mould and filthy bandages was not happy.

She kept her ears open. She knew what was going on, down there in those linked catacombs, and up there, in the strongpoints not yet reduced, in the buildings now blazing to high heaven. She heard them talk of the Wonder-Rabbi of Semienka, whose underground Court was not far off. She wondered once or twice whether she should find her way to him, and sit down



in his presence for a few minutes and come away again. She smiled dimly at the thought of the prim pleasure that would give Esther, her eldest sister, if she was still alive, and if she could ever get to hear of it. Esther was always the one for synagogue-going, she had been a great pillar of the women's section of the Lithuanian Brotherhood; their mother, too, from time to time, when the fit got hold of her.

But Elsie did not pay a visit to the Wonder-Rabbi's Court. She was just a trifle afraid of herself; of the other Elsie, that is to say. She was afraid that she might meet the other Elsie half-way there, and the other Elsie would turn her back. And, in any case, she was exceedingly busy; far busier than she had ever been in her life before, even when she had done several shows a day for the troops in France during the earlier war. So she did not see the Wonder-Rabbi of Semienka they all talked of, who made the pain of the breaking heart and the broken bone easier.

She did not see Chaim, either, who was one of the legends of the Ghetto Battle. The tale of Chaim went back earlier than the Battle; for she herself had heard her hostess, Frau Wolff, tell the tale of Chaim and his lost sweetheart, Tavele. But it seems that it was in the Battle the young man found her. "Tavele! Tavele!" he cried exultantly, in the room where at last the Germans came upon him; "Tavele!" he cried, and fell riddled with bullets among the litter of spent cartridge-cases.

She heard tales of Berel the Communist, and Symplak the Zionist; and of Smul Ziegelbojm, who was pleading their cause in London; and of the Jew Klepfisz the Boy, and of Artur the Pole, the Catholic; how brilliantly they conducted the operations, retreating all the time from burning building to building, from cellar to cellar, as retreat they must, but making the enemy pay dearly from move to move. She heard tales of Raven, the Russian girl with the red kerchief, who was herself like a bullet, so swift and certain she was.

She heard these tales, and saw some of the heroes with her own eyes. She soon became aware that it was none other than the Boy himself, and this same Raven, who had swept her into the safety of the cellars on the eve of the Battle. She saw them both again, and her mind, as ever, began playing tricks with them. Oh yes. The Boy. He had something of that young Doomington poet in his face. What was his name? She could not recall his name. He lived down in Bridgeways somewhere. His father was a Hebrew-teacher.

And the Russian girl, Raven. She set eyes on her more than once again. It was quite idiotic how much this Raven looked like Susan, her own sister, the next one up in the line of Silver daughters. Moreover, Susan had gone to Russia, for she had married Boris Polednik, the tailor who became a Kommisar out there. How idiotically like Susan this Raven was, the same lanky limbs, the same square forehead, the same thin tip-tilted nose.

"Don't be a fool!" she told herself. "Get on with your job!"



It was on the evening of the fifth day down in the cellars that she met Wolff the baker, to whose care Oskar had confided her. He had come in with some fresh supplies for the Post. He recognized her at once and came over to her.

"You're all right, Fräulein?" he said. "You're not hurt?"

"I'm fine. How are you? Is Frau Wolff well?"

"She's well," he answered shortly. She did not know whether that meant she was alive or dead. "I've been wondering whether I'd see you again. I hardly expected to, of course."

"Of course not."

"But I'd made up my mind to make a proposition to you in case I met you again." He lowered his voice, and looked round. He did not want to be overheard.

"Yes?" she asked curiously. She wondered what proposition there was he could possibly make to her.

"Listen. Your German friend was a good man. No, I won't say that. He was better than those others."

"I'm glad." Despite the queer numb pang in her heart, she was genuinely pleased that Wolff did not think too ill of Oskar. Undoubtedly Oskar had deteriorated. Who had not? But he had been better than those others, said Wolff.

"I feel I owe him a debt of honour," Wolff continued. "He confided you to me. I ought to give him the chance of having you back again."

"Yes?" She raised her eyes.

"There's one way in from the town which the Germans haven't got on to yet. It's along a network of water-drains which were begun, and left uncompleted, a good many years ago. Very few people outside or inside know about it. You see the point of that, don't you?"

"I think so."

"The number of people who could escape that way is very limited. There are still many thousands down here, and certainly many would like to get away if they could."

"Yes."

"The channel is very important to us, because of the stuff the Poles are still getting through. You see now?"

"I see."

"I know, if I asked the leaders, they'd allow me to take you out that way. Of course, once you got there you'd have to look after yourself. Would you like me to ask them?"

She smiled at him. It was a sweet smile, he thought; this woman must have charmed a good many men in her time with that smile.

"I thank you so much. It's most kind of you. But no."



"You mean that? No?"

She repeated it.

"No."

He smiled in his turn. The smile was charming but very sad.

"I ought to be going, Fräulein. Everybody's very busy. God bless you, Fräulein."

"God bless you, Herr Wolff." She devoted herself to her patient again. He walked on for some yards, then turned, and looked at her for some moments. She is a strange and beautiful woman, he thought. There is a certain glory about her.

## VII

The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto divides itself into two major phases: the direct assault with tanks and infantry and supporting weapons; the remote assault with siege guns and bombing aeroplanes. The direct assault went on for some six or seven days, and cost the Germans some thousand or more casualties. That was a considerable proportion of Hinze's effectives; and, seeing the weapons they had at their disposal, is a measure of the valour and desperateness of the defence. Hinze must have seen after three days at most that the direct attack was not going to achieve the results he hoped for, the results which were necessary for the maintenance of his prestige. But he underestimated his opponents, as the Germans have so often done, to their undoing; not so much their physical resources, though these probably surprised him, frivolous though they were in comparison with the weight of his own weapons. He underestimated their spiritual resources. If he could not prise them out of their holes, he felt he could so blast and bedevil them by shelling and burning down their buildings, they must sooner or later come trooping out into the open, their hands above their heads. When once that started, he estimated, the rot would go on till nothing was left but a few survivors dug into isolated rat-holes here and there.

But it did not happen like that. After the first twenty hours Hinze relieved a section of his attacking infantry, and sent in three hundred more men. Later, he committed another three hundred. The force he used was some fifteen hundred all told, without counting the crews of tanks and armoured cars. But the swine remained obdurate and invincible. Over at Gestapo House, Leszno Street, Müller laughed his head off. If he was going to be axed when all this was over, Hinze was going to be awarded no oak leaves.

Hinze did not laugh. He smiled grimly. He knew where the last word lay. If he found it really impossible to bring the swine to their senses by



attack at close quarters, all he needed to do was to post a few big guns at a respectable distance and whistle up the Luftwaffe for a squadron of bombers. He might have committed some more assault men, of course; but that would have been to approach someone else's command. That he was reluctant to do, both because of the loss of face it involved, and because it was probably dangerous at this moment to deplete the local garrison force. He well knew what a demoralizing effect the resistance of these Jews was having on the almost as subhuman Poles. No, he determined, he would do the trick himself. His men were having an unconscionably tough time; but that was what they were there for.

He did not do the trick himself. The face of the man was black as thunder. I'll have to go cap in hand to Witzleben, he admitted finally. Then the sour grin came back to his face again. A couple of hours' bombing, with a nice shower of incendiaries, would do the trick. Witzleben would doubtless bomb at night. That is always more upsetting to the nerves than day bombing. He would also plant a few siege guns around the place. In a couple of hours the Jews would come scuttling out of their drains as if they had been pumped full of poison gas.

"Oi! Oi! Oi!" the Jews would cry. "*Gewald! Gewald!*"

He would give them Oi, Oi, Oi, Hinze promised them. He would crucify them every one separately, man, woman and child, as if each one were Jesus Christ.

He whistled up his squadron of bombers. They were heavy bombers, old-fashioned; that did not matter at all. It did not matter how low they came, so long as they didn't capsize in the shock of their own explosions. They had no ack-ack to think of. He planted his big guns at various convenient points in the perimeter of the Ghetto, eliminating a number of buildings outside the Wall that were in the line of fire.

His squadron of heavy bombers came. They dropped their loads of bombs and incendiaries, went back and loaded up again, came and dropped their stuff again. The big guns lobbed their shells over the Wall. This lasted not for two hours, but for two weeks, three weeks, four weeks. The Jews did not issue from their cellars, crying "Oi! Oi! Oi!" A few hundred here, a few hundred there, exposed by the burning or explosion of the buildings above their heads, scorched, maimed, stunned, were taken prisoner, to be shot out of hand, or corralled into the cemetery for transportation on the eastern Journey. But, for the most part, the Jews remained in their cellars. There was no fighting to do against bombs and shells. You could fight the fires and dress the wounds. And go on fighting the fires and dressing the wounds. Till at length the time came when there was no-one there any more to dress wounds or fight fires. Then it would be all over.

Not *all* over, they told themselves confidently down there in the reeking



pits, in the choking abyss ; not *all* over. So long as there are Jews on this planet who choose to recall the noble deeds of their kinsmen, it would not be all over.

On the second day of the Battle the Polish Labour Movement of Warsaw published this declaration :

*Poles, citizens, soldiers for freedom ! From under the beating of the cannons which the German army is hammering against our houses, the homes of our mothers, wives and children ; from under the blows of the machine-guns, which we have captured in the struggle against the cowardly German police and S.S. forces ; from under the smoke of conflagration and the blood of the murdered Warsaw Ghetto, we slaves in the Ghetto send you our greetings. We know that with heartfelt sorrow and tears of sympathy, with admiration and terror, you witness the epilogue of the battle we have carried on for several days against the cruel invader.*

*But you see also that each threshold in the Ghetto has been until now and will continue to be a stronghold. We may all die in this battle, but we will not succumb. We breathe, as you do, with the desire for revenge and punishment for all the crimes of our common enemy.*

*This is a battle for our and your freedom.*

*For your and our human, social and national honour.*

*We shall avenge the crimes of Oswieçim, Treblinka, Belzec and Maidanek.*

*Long live the brotherhood of battle and the blood of fighting Poland.*

*Long live freedom.*

*Death to the hangmen.*

*Long live the life-and-death struggle against the invader.*

This was followed by an appeal from the Central Command of the Jewish Fighting Organization.

*People of Warsaw !*

*We realize that the Polish underground movement pays homage to the fighters of the Ghetto. But only the United Nations can give immediate and concrete aid.*

*In the name of the millions of murdered Jews ; in the name of all those who were burned, tortured and slaughtered ; in the name of those who are still fighting heroically though condemned to certain death in an unequal struggle, we call to the world to listen to us today.*

*The Allies must avenge our death and our suffering, so that even the bestial enemy may understand why he is being punished. Our Allies must finally realize that a tremendous historic responsibility will fall upon those who remained*



*passive in face of the unbelievable Nazi crime against a whole people whose tragic epilogue we witness today. The desperate heroism of the people of the Ghetto must stir the world to an action equal to the greatness of the moment!*

It cannot be said that there was any immediate or direct answer to this appeal. But answer there certainly was in the fullness of time, with the pounding of many feet, and the speech of divers tongues, and with thunder and lightning.

### VIII

It was on the evening of the eighth day, before *meyeriv*, the evening service, that the Wonder-Rabbi of Semienka was last seen by mortal eye. There were more Jews, both men and women, assembled in the passage leading to the cellar which had become his academy and synagogue, than there had been during the earlier days; for there was less to do now, less fighting, and, for those who wished it, more praying.

The story is told that as the men were about to enter for the service—the women remaining, as is proper, in the antechamber—the Wonder-Rabbi raised his hand and summoned his *Bocher* to him, his last disciple, who had served him well. The *Bocher* went over and brought his head close to the old man's mouth, for the man was indeed old, and, in the terms of this earth, feeble, for he had not eaten for many days.

"I beg you," the old man breathed, "bid the Jews go from this place at once. Let them celebrate *meyeriv* elsewhere."

"But, Rabbi——" the *Bocher* began.

The old man stared into the face of his *Bocher*. The aspect of his eyes was like the blue part of flame.

"I command you," he said. "Let them go at once."

The *Bocher* went away and spoke to the men and women there.

"He orders that we go to make *meyeriv* in another place," he said. "At once, he says."

So the men and women left, and went along one passage and another, and came to another cellar, where they duly said the appointed prayers, there being a quorum of ten, and more.

But in the middle of the service, sinful though it is to intermit the prayers, the *Bocher* crept away, for a fear gnawed at his heart-strings and he loved his Master dearly. He went back along the passages and came at length to the cellar where the Wonder-Rabbi had so lately been, and with him the Holy Books on the table between the candlesticks, and the Holy Ark against the wall.



The table was there, and the candlesticks on the table. But neither the Holy Books were there, nor the Holy Ark. And the Wonder-Rabbi of Semienka was not there. No human creature was there, nothing but a light which seemed steadier and brighter and purer than the light of candles.

This was the tale the *Bocher* told the Jews saying the *meyeriv* prayers that night, not even waiting till the service was over. And whether that was the truth, or he had dreamed it, could never be ascertained, for a heavy bomb came down minutes later in the place where the Rabbi and the holy things had been, and utterly destroyed it.

## IX

It was that same evening, or maybe the evening after that, that Tania Polednikova spoke to her mother's sister, once known as Elsie Silver, for the second and the last time.

A Russian agent had been brought into the Post in a state of collapse by one of the Polish contacts, a certain Yanta. It was stated by this Yanta that the Russian had only arrived in the Ghetto that very day. It was not easy to understand why, if he was outside the Ghetto, he insisted on being brought in. For he bore no load of baratol or other useful material; there was no more fighting to do; and, if there had been, he would not have been much use. He was a Moscow emissary, like Tania, and, having been ordered to enter the Ghetto, presumably he conceived it was his duty to enter the Ghetto. That was all.

Yet there was another reason, as became manifest soon.

"Does anyone know what section Raven is in," asked Yanta the Pole, "if she's still alive? The comrade wishes to speak to Raven." It chanced that someone knew where she was; she was not far off. Yanta went off and came back with her some twenty minutes later. In the meantime Elsie and Monash, the student, had got to work on the Moscow emissary. He said his name was Blum. He was in a bad state. He had been shot up extensively and had received no treatment. The wounds in his thigh were festering, and smelled very badly. Even Elsie and Monash, who were used by now to festering wounds, recoiled from the stench for one moment, though they quickly recovered themselves and got on with the job.

Then Raven entered, her kerchief still round her neck, bedraggled though it was, and almost black with dirt.

She went over to the man called Blum.

"Greeting, comrade," she said. "You've got here at last. I had to take over for you in your absence."

"They tell me you did well," Blum said weakly. "I'm glad of that."



They talked Russian. To Elsie Silver, at least, their conversation was unintelligible.

"They shot you up, eh? Bad luck." For Raven those were quite fulsome words of sympathy. "I was luckier than you."

"I have some good news for you," said Blum.

"Yes, yes?" Her voice was quite eager. "How are we doing now on the fronts?"

"That's what I want to tell you. We're doing well on all fronts. We've got them on the run in various places."

"Oh, that's fine, fine!" She clapped her hands like an enthusiastic schoolgirl. "Death to the Fascist invader!" She had always been a great one for slogans.

"Were they talking about General Maskelnikov while you were still back in the woods, Raven?"

"Yes. He's one of the new men, isn't he? What about him?"

"His right-hand man is Colonel Pravchenko. You've not heard of him, I think. For my part, I was called back to Moscow and heard a good deal about him!"

"Well then?"

"He thought it better to repudiate his old name, as he repudiated the ideas which brought him down."

Her mouth dropped, that firm self-assured mouth of Tania Polednikova. The colour went out of her cheeks, whatever colour was left there.

"Who is he? What was his old name?"

"You know well what his old name was, comrade. His name was Boris Polednik. Oh!" he exclaimed. The woman who was swabbing out his sores made a sudden clumsy movement.

"I'm sorry!" the woman murmured. "Forgive me!" She talked in a German which had become Yiddish in intonation, at least, during these last days and nights.

"Oh, that's all right, comrade!" the man from Moscow said, in Yiddish. Then he addressed Tania again, again talking Russian. He was brilliant, the reinstated Colonel, said Blum. He would be made a General any day now; but probably he had been made a General already. They were saying that if the enemy's onslaught on the Caucasus were finally checked, it would be largely due to Pravchenko's extraordinary strategic intelligence. Your father, Raven. Your father.

Raven's eyes shone. The colour was quite bright in her cheeks.

"I would like to see him again," she said. You might have thought her any bourgeois daughter of any bourgeois father. The whole situation had a certain un-Marxian smell.

"I hope I shall be able to get away from this place," she said, after a pause.



"They expect us back, if we can make it, Raven."

"We must get you well, Blum," she said firmly. "In a couple of days you'll be comfortable again—if nothing drops on us in the meantime. I think I could get you back all right." She turned suddenly to the woman who was treating the sores. "I say, comrade," she said in Yiddish. "I want you to do all you can to get the comrade right. Show what you can do, will you?" Then suddenly Tania perceived she knew who the woman was. It was the woman who, on the eve of the Battle, had been yelling at the S.S. men in Nalewki like a basketful of cats and had been trying to scratch their eyes out.

"Oh, it's you," she said, "the crazy one! How are you, comrade?"

"I'm fine, Raven," said Elsie Silver, her heart almost bursting with pride and love.

For she knew, of course, that the girl was her sister's daughter. A less intelligent woman would have gathered the drift of the conversation; she would not have failed to add to the name of Boris Polednik the hair, the eyes, the nose, the frame, of Susan Silver, and divide them by two, and produce this daughter of theirs, this lanky tomboy, this flaring myth, this splendid child.

But no, said Elsie Silver to herself; or Channah, or whoever she was. What point is there in telling her who I am? There is less than no point. One, she won't believe me. She'll think I'm crazy, all the more because she remembers our first meeting so clearly. And two, supposing she believes me? Do I particularly want to saddle her with an aunt who's the widow of a Nazi general? I think not. No, I think not. And suppose she throws both her arms round my neck, do I want to tie myself to her apron-strings? If she survives, and if her comrade survives, it will be as much as she can manage to get one lame duck away.

No, my dear, no. I belong to a dead day. You belong to the days that are to come. Go in peace, darling, if you can make it.

"Yes, Raven," Elsie Silver murmured. "We'll do all we can to get the comrade right." She turned to Monash, the student. "Won't we, Monash?"

"Yes, Channah, yes," he said testily. As if they ever did anything else!

X

There is no record whether the woman known during the greater part of this narrative as "Elsie Silver", and during its final episode as "Channah", survived the insensate bombardment of the Warsaw Ghetto, which continued for a full month and more; and there was still desultory sniping from



holes and heaps of rubble when the German infantry tried to root out the final survivors. It is to be presumed she did not survive.

It is known on the other hand that the young Russian emissary, whom they called "Raven" with so much pride and affection, succeeded in making her escape. The other leaders died, the Boy, Berel, Artur, and so did many thousands of others. But the girl Raven felt it was her duty to escape, and she escaped.

She was one of a band of sixty who escaped after two months in the deep sewers of Warsaw. They stayed so long as that, because they correctly surmised that if they made no move over so long a stretch of time the Germans would be certain that the last defender was dead of starvation or asphyxiation in those dreadful depths.

The band made its way north-eastward to a sewer exit far off on the bank of the Vistula and emerged late at night. If the Germans had guarded that exit earlier, they did so no longer, for they were sure no-one would issue that way. With extreme circumspection the band made its way northward, and at length, some fifty miles away, they swam the river, always by night.

They swam the river at this point, not only because they judged it far enough away from Warsaw, but because their comrades in the Polish Underground had informed them there was a small German garrison a little distance back from the river, at a place called Plec. The band had few weapons between them, and no ammunition at all, and they sorely needed it. They therefore kept a careful watch on the garrison for several days and nights, and at last crept up upon it and wiped it out to a man.

The band was joined by a number of Polish guerillas, and, mixed Jews and Gentiles as they were, they called themselves "The Avengers of the Warsaw Ghetto", and were a thorn in the flesh of the German garrisons in those parts for many months to come.

As for Raven, Tania Polednikova, she duly made her way back to headquarters in Moscow, where she composed and delivered a thesis worthy of the highest traditions of the October Technical College in Kiev, of which she had been so bright an ornament. That accomplished, and having presented her compliments to her English-born mother, she demanded permission to join the forces of her father, General Pravchenko, for, like the authorities, she was prepared to let bygones be bygones. Permission was duly granted, and it is reported that father and daughter were delighted to meet their acquaintance after their long separation.

THE END



